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## INDIA'S FREEDOM

Before India became independent in 1947 Nehru was second only to Gandhi as a symbol of Indian aspirations and, like him, suffered several terms of imprisonment. Since then, as Prime Minister, he has taken his place among the statesmen of the world. This selection from his essays, letters and speeches reveals the three enduring strands of his thought: his hatred of imperialism, of domination of any country by another; his undoctrinaire socialism, the ideal of government for the benefit of all without regard for vested interests; and, of course, his vision of India as a free nation solving her own problems in her own way.

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JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

INDIA'S FREEDOM

Jawaharlal Nehru



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in June 1936

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## EDITORIAL NOTE

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This selection of essays, letters and speeches is substantially the same as that originally made by H. G. Alexander in 1936 at a time when Jawaharlal Nehru's writings and utterances were not so well known as they are today. Six chapters from the original volume have been omitted, 'Prison Land', 'The Mind of a Judge', 'First Letter to Indira', 'India and the World', 'The Way to Peace', and 'Indian Problems', while 'Nehru's Statement at his Trial', 'A Letter from an Englishman', and 'A Tryst with Destiny' have been added. Further cuts have been kept to a minimum, with the exception of the 'Presidential Address to the National Congress, Lucknow, 1936', which has been reduced to about half its original length.

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CHAPTER I

*Presidential Address to the National Congress,  
Lahore, December 1929*

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FOR four-and-forty years this National Congress has laboured for the freedom of India. During this period it has somewhat slowly but surely awakened national consciousness from its long stupor and built up the national movement. If today we are gathered here at a crisis of our destiny, conscious of our strength as well as of our weakness, and looking with hope and apprehension to the future, it is well that we give first thought to those who spent their lives with little hope of reward so that those that follow them may have the joy of achievement. Many of the giants of old are not with us and we of a later day, standing on an eminence of their creation, may often decry their efforts. That is the way of the world. But none of you can forget them or the great work they did in laying the foundations of a free India. And none of us can ever forget that glorious band of men and women who, without recking the consequences, have laid down their young lives or spent their bright youth in suffering and torment in utter protest against a foreign domination. Many of their names even are not known to us. They laboured and suffered in silence without any expectation of public applause, and by their heart's blood they nursed the tender plant of India's freedom. While many of us temporized and compromised, they stood up and proclaimed a people's right to freedom and declared to the world that India, even in her degradation, had the spark of life in her, because she refused to submit to tyranny and serfdom. Brick by brick has our national movement been built up, and often on the prostrate bodies of her martyred sons has India advanced. The giants of old may not be with us, but the courage of old is with us still, and India can yet produce martyrs like Jatindra and Wizaya.

This is the glorious legacy that we have inherited, and you wish to put me in charge of it! I know well that I occupy this honoured place by chance more than by your deliberate design. Your desire was to choose another<sup>1</sup>—one who towers above all others in this

<sup>1</sup> Gandhi—who declined the invitation; so Nehru succeeded his father, Motilal, as President.

present-day world of ours—and there could have been no wiser choice. But fate and he conspired together and thrust me against your will and mine into this terrible seat of responsibility. Should I express my gratitude to you for having placed me in this dilemma? But I am grateful indeed for your confidence in one who strangely lacks it himself.

You will discuss many vital national problems that face us today, and your decisions may change the course of Indian history. But you are not the only people that are faced with problems. The whole world today is one vast question mark, and every country and every people is in the melting-pot. The age of faith, with the comfort and stability it brings, is past, and there is questioning about everything, however permanent or sacred it might have appeared to our forefathers. Everywhere there is doubt and restlessness, and the foundations of the State and society are in process of transformation. Old-established ideas of liberty, justice, property, and even the family are being attacked, and the outcome hangs in the balance. We appear to be in a dissolving period of history, when the world is in labour and out of her travail will give birth to a new order.

No one can say what the future will bring, but we may assert with some confidence that Asia, and even India, will play a determining part in future world policy. The brief day of European domination is already approaching its end. Europe has ceased to be the centre of activity and interest. The future lies with America and Asia. Owing to false and incomplete history many of us have been led to think that Europe has always dominated over the rest of the world, and Asia has always let the legions of the West thunder past and has plunged in thought again. We have forgotten that for millennia the legions of Asia overran Europe, and modern Europe itself largely consists of the descendants of these invaders from Asia. We have forgotten that it was India that finally broke the military power of Alexander. Thought has undoubtedly been the glory of Asia and specially of India, but in the field of action the record of Asia has been equally great. But none of us desires that the legions of Asia or Europe should overrun the continents again. We have all had enough of them.

India today is a part of a world movement. Not only China, Turkey, Persia, and Egypt, but also Russia and the countries of the West are taking part in this movement, and India cannot isolate herself from it. We have our own problems, difficult and intricate, and we cannot run away from them and take shelter in the wider problems that affect the world. But if we ignore the world we do so

at our peril. Civilization today, such as it is, is not the creation or the monopoly of one people or nation. It is a composite fabric to which all countries have contributed and then have adapted to suit their particular needs. And if India has a message to give to the world, as I hope she has, she has also to receive and learn much from the messages of other peoples.

When everything is changing it is well to remember the long course of Indian history. Few things in history are more amazing than the wonderful stability of the social structure in India which withstood the impact of numerous alien influences and thousands of years of change and conflict. It withstood them because it always sought to absorb them and tolerate them. Its aim was not to exterminate but to establish an equilibrium between different cultures. Aryans and non-Aryans settled down together recognizing each other's right to their culture, and outsiders who came, like the Parsis, found a welcome and a place in the social order. With the coming of the Moslems the equilibrium was disturbed, but India sought to restore it, and largely succeeded. Unhappily for us, before we could adjust our differences, the political structure broke down, the British came and we fell.

Great as was the success of India in evolving a stable society she failed in a vital particular, and because she failed in this, she fell and remains fallen. No solution was found for the problem of equality. India deliberately ignored this and built up her social structure on inequality, and we have the tragic consequences of this policy in the millions of our people who till yesterday were suppressed and had little opportunity for growth.

When Europe fought her wars of religion and Christians massacred each other in the name of their Saviour, India was tolerant, although, alas, there is little of this toleration today. Having attained some measure of religious liberty, Europe sought after political liberty and political and legal equality. Having attained these also she finds that they mean very little without economic liberty and equality. And so today politics have ceased to have much meaning, and the most vital question is that of social and economic equality.

India also will have to find a solution to this problem, and until she does so her political and social structure cannot have stability. That solution need not necessarily follow the example of any other country. It must, if it has to endure, be based on the genius of her people and be an outcome of her thought and culture. And when it is found, the unhappy differences between various communities, which trouble us today and keep back our freedom, will automatically disappear.

Indeed the real differences have already largely gone, but fear of each other and distrust and suspicion remain and sow seeds of discord. The problem before us is not one of removing differences. They can well remain side by side and enrich our many-sided culture. The problem is how to remove fear and suspicion, and, being intangible, they are hard to get at. An earnest attempt was made to do so last year by the All Parties Committee, and much progress was made towards the goal. But we must admit with sorrow that success has not wholly crowned its efforts. Many of our Muslim and Sikh friends have strenuously opposed the solutions suggested, and passions have been roused over mathematical figures and percentages. Logic and cold reason are poor weapons to fight fear and distrust. Only faith and generosity can overcome them. I can only hope that the leaders of various communities will have this faith and generosity in ample measure. What shall we gain for ourselves or for our community if all of us are slaves in a slave country? And what can we lose if once we remove the shackles from India and can breathe the air of freedom again? Do we want outsiders, who are not of us and who have kept us in bondage, to be the protectors of our little rights and privileges, when they deny us the very right to freedom? No majority can crush a determined minority, and no minority can be sufficiently protected by a little addition to its seats in a legislature. Let us remember that in the world today, almost everywhere, a very small minority holds wealth and power and dominates over the great majority.

I have no love for bigotry and dogmatism in religion, and I am glad that they are weakening. Nor do I love communalism in any shape or form. I find it difficult to appreciate why political or economic rights should depend on the membership of a religious group or community. I can fully understand the right to freedom in religion and the right to one's culture, and in India specially, which has always acknowledged and granted these rights, it should be no difficult matter to ensure their continuance. We have only to find out some way whereby we may root out the fear and distrust that darken our horizon today. The politics of a subject race are largely based on fear and hatred, and we have been too long under subjection to get rid of them easily.

I was born a Hindu, but I do not know how far I am justified in calling myself one or in speaking on behalf of Hindus. But birth still counts in this country, and by right of birth I shall venture to submit to the leaders of the Hindus that it should be their privilege to take the lead in generosity. Generosity is not only good morals, but is often good politics and sound expediency. And it is incon-

ceivable to me that in a free India the Hindus can ever be powerless. So far as I am concerned I would gladly ask our Muslim and Sikh friends to take what they will without protest or argument from me. I know that the time is coming soon when these labels and appellations will have little meaning and when our struggles will be on an economic basis. Meanwhile it matters little what our mutual arrangements are, provided only that we do not build up barriers which will come in the way of future progress.

The time has indeed already come when the All-Parties Report has to be put aside and we march forward unfettered to our goal. You will remember the resolution of the last Congress which fixed a year of grace for the adoption of the All-Parties scheme.<sup>1</sup> That year is nearly over, and the natural issue of that decision is for this Congress to declare in favour of independence and devise sanctions to achieve it.

That year has not brought Dominion Status or the All-Parties Constitution. It has brought instead suffering and greater repression of our national and labour movements, and how many of our comrades are today forcibly kept away from us by the alien power! How many of them suffer exile in foreign countries and are refused facilities to return to their motherland! The army of occupation holds our country in its iron grip, and the whip of the master is ever ready to come down on the best of us who dare to raise their heads. The answer to the Calcutta resolution has been clear and definite.

What will this Congress do? The conditions for co-operation remain unfulfilled. Can we co-operate so long as there is no guarantee that real freedom will come to us? Can we co-operate when our comrades lie in prison and repression continues? Can we co-operate until we are assured that real peace is sought after and not merely a tactical advantage over us? Peace cannot come at the point of the bayonet, and if we are to continue to be dominated over by an alien people, let us at least be no consenting parties to it.

If the Calcutta resolution holds, we have but one goal today, that of independence. Independence is not a happy word in the world today, for it means exclusiveness and isolation. Civilization has had enough of narrow nationalism and gropes towards a wider co-operation and interdependence. And if we use the word independence we do so in no sense hostile to the larger ideal. Independence

<sup>1</sup> A committee representing all the important political parties and groups in India prepared a 'Dominion Status' Constitution for India. The National Congress decided in 1928 at Calcutta that unless the British Government accepted this scheme within one year, it would revert to its demand for complete independence, and undertake a campaign to secure it.

for us means complete freedom from British domination and British imperialism. Having attained our freedom I have no doubt that India will welcome all attempts at world co-operation and federation, and will even agree to give up part of her own independence to a larger group of which she is an equal member.

The British Empire today is not such a group, and cannot be so long as it dominates over millions of peoples and holds large areas of the world's surface despite the will of their inhabitants. It cannot be a true commonwealth so long as imperialism is its basis and the exploitation of other races its chief means of sustenance. The British Empire today is indeed gradually undergoing a process of political dissolution. It is in a state of unstable equilibrium. The Union of South Africa is not a very happy member of the family, nor is the Irish Free State a willing one. Egypt drifts away. India could never be an equal member of the Commonwealth unless imperialism and all it implies is discarded. So long as this is not done India's position in the Empire must be one of subservience, and her exploitation will continue. The embrace of the British Empire is a dangerous thing. It cannot be the life-giving embrace of affection freely given and returned. And if it is not that, it will be, what it has been in the past, the embrace of death.

There is talk of world peace and pacts have been signed by the nations of the world. But despite pacts armaments grow and beautiful language is the only homage that is paid to the goddess of peace. Peace can only come when the causes of war are removed. So long as there is the domination of one country over another, or the exploitation of one class by another, there will always be attempts to subvert the existing order, and no stable equilibrium can endure. Out of imperialism and capitalism peace can never come. And it is because the British Empire stands for these, and bases itself on the exploitation of the masses, that we can find no willing place in it. No gain that may come to us is worth anything unless it helps in removing the grievous burdens on our masses. The weight of a great empire is heavy to carry, and long our people have endured it. Their backs are bent and down and their spirit has almost broken. How will they share in the commonwealth partnership if the burden of exploitation continues? Many of the problems we have to face are the problems of vested interests, mostly created or encouraged by the British Government. The interests of rulers of Indian States, of British officials, and British capital and Indian capital, and of the owners of big zamindaris are ever thrust before us, and they clamour for protection. The unhappy millions who really need protection are almost voiceless, and have few advocates. So long as

the British Empire continues in India, in whatever shape it may do so, it will strengthen these vested interests and create more. And each one of them will be a fresh obstacle in our way. Of necessity the Government has to rely on oppression, and the symbol of its rule is the secret service with its despicable and contemptible train of *agents provocateurs*, informers, and approvers.

We have had much controversy about independence and Dominion Status, and we have quarrelled about words. But the real thing is the conquest of power by whatever name it may be called. I do not think that any form of Dominion Status applicable to India will give us real power. A test of this power would be the entire withdrawal of the alien army of occupation and economic control. Let us, therefore, concentrate on these and the rest will follow easily.

We stand, therefore, today for the fullest freedom of India. This Congress has not acknowledged and will not acknowledge the right of the British Parliament to dictate to us in any way. To it we make no appeal. But we do appeal to the parliament and conscience of the world, and to them we shall declare, I hope, that India submits no longer to any foreign domination. Today or tomorrow we may not be strong enough to assert our will. We are very conscious of our weakness, and there is no boasting in us or pride of strength. But let no one, least of all England, mistake or underrate the meaning or strength of our resolve. Solemnly, with full knowledge of consequences, I hope, we shall take it and there will be no turning back. A great nation cannot be thwarted for long when once its mind is clear and resolved. If today we fail and tomorrow brings no success, the day after will follow and bring achievement.

We are weary of strife and hunger for peace and opportunity to work constructively for our country. Do we enjoy the breaking up of our homes and the sight of our brave young men going to prison or facing the halter? Does the worker like going on strike and losing his miserable pittance and starving? He does so by sheer compulsion when there is no other way for him. And we who take this perilous path of national strife do so because there is no other way to an honourable peace. But we long for peace, and the hand of fellowship will always be stretched out to all who may care to grasp it. But behind the hand will be a body which will not bend to injustice, and a mind that will not surrender on any vital point.

With the struggle before us the time for determining our future constitution is not yet. But we cannot ignore the problems that beset us and that will make or mar our struggle and our future constitution. We have to aim at social adjustment and equilibrium, and

to overcome the forces of disruption that have been the bane of India.

I must frankly confess that I am a Socialist and a republican, and am no believer in kings and princes, or in the order which produces the modern kings of industry, who have greater power over the lives and fortunes of men than even the kings of old, and whose methods are as predatory as those of the old feudal aristocracy. I recognize, however, that it may not be possible for a body constituted as is this National Congress, and in the present circumstances of the country, to adopt a full Socialistic programme. But we must realize that the philosophy of Socialism has gradually permeated the entire structure of society the world over, and almost the only points in dispute are the pace and the methods of advance to its full realization. India will have to go that way, too, if she seeks to end her poverty and inequality, though she may evolve her own methods and may adapt the ideal to the genius of her race.

We have three major problems—the minorities, the Indian States, and labour and peasantry. I have dealt already with the question of minorities. I shall only repeat that we must give the fullest assurance by our words and deeds that their culture and traditions will be safe.

The Indian States, even for India, are the most curious relics of a bygone age. Many of their rulers apparently still believe in the divine right of kings—puppet kings though they be—and consider the State and all it contains to be their personal property, which they can squander at will. A few of them have a sense of responsibility and have endeavoured to serve their people, but many of them have hardly any redeeming feature. It is perhaps unjust to blame them, for they are but the products of a vicious system, and it is the system that will ultimately have to go. One of the rulers has told us frankly that even in case of war between India and England he will stand for England and fight against his mother country. That is the measure of his patriotism. It is not surprising, then, that they claim, and their claim finds acceptance with the British Government, that they alone can represent their subjects at any conference, and no one even of their subjects may have any say. The Indian States cannot live apart from the rest of India, and their rulers must, unless they accept their inevitable limitations, go the way of others who thought like them. And the only people who have a right to determine the future of the States must be the people of those States, including the rulers. This Congress which claims self-determination cannot deny it to the people of the States. Meanwhile, the Congress is perfectly willing to confer with such rulers as are

prepared to do so, and to devise means whereby the transition may not be too sudden. But in no event can the people of the States be ignored.

Our third major problem is the biggest of all. For India means the peasantry and labour, and to the extent that we raise them and satisfy their wants, will we succeed in our task. And the measure of the strength of our national movement will be the measure of their adherence to it. We can only gain them to our side by our espousing their cause, which is really the country's cause. The Congress has often expressed its goodwill toward them, but beyond that it has not gone. The Congress, it is said, must hold the balance fairly between capital and labour and zamindar and tenant. But the balance has been and is terribly weighted on one side, and to maintain the *status quo* is to maintain injustice and exploitation. The only way to right it is to do away with the domination of any one class over another. The All-India Congress Committee accepted this ideal of social and economic change in a resolution it passed some months ago in Bombay. I hope the Congress will also set its seal on it, and will further draw up a programme of such changes as can be immediately put in operation.

In this programme perhaps the Congress as a whole cannot go very far today. But it must keep the ultimate ideal in view and work for it. The question is not one merely of wages and charity doled out by an employer or landlord. Paternalism in industry or in the land is but a form of charity with all its sting and its utter incapacity to root out the evil. The new theory of trusteeship, which some advocate, is equally barren. For trusteeship means that the power for good or evil remains with the self-appointed trustee, and he may exercise it as he will. The sole trusteeship that can be fair is the trusteeship of the nation and not of one individual or a group. Many Englishmen honestly consider themselves the trustees for India, and yet to what a condition have they reduced our country!

We have to decide for whose benefit industry must be run and the land produce food. Today the abundance that the land produces is not for the peasant or the labourer who work on it; and industry's chief function is supposed to be to produce millionaires. However golden the harvest and heavy the dividends, the mud huts and hovels and nakedness of our people testify to the glory of the British Empire and of our present social system.

Our economic programme must, therefore, be based on a human outlook and must not sacrifice man to money. If an industry cannot be run without starving its workers, then the industry must close down. If the workers on the land have not enough to eat, then the

intermediaries who deprive them of their full share must go. The least that every worker in field or factory is entitled to is a minimum wage which will enable him to live in moderate comfort, and humane hours of labour which do not break his strength and spirit.

But industrial labour is only a small part of India, although it is rapidly becoming a force that cannot be ignored. It is the peasantry that cry loudly and piteously for relief, and our programme must deal with their present condition. Real relief can only come by a great change in the land laws and the basis of the present system of land tenure. We have among us many big landowners, and we welcome them. But they must realize that the ownership of large estates by individuals, which is the outcome of a state resembling the old feudalism of Europe, is a rapidly disappearing phenomenon all over the world. Even in countries which are the strongholds of capitalism the large estates are being split up and given to the peasantry who work on them. In India also we have large areas where the system of peasant proprietorship prevails, and we shall have to extend this all over the country. I hope that in doing so we may have the co-operation of some at least of the big landowners.

All these are pious hopes till we gain power, and the real problem, therefore, before us is the conquest of power. We shall not do so by subtle reasoning or argument or lawyers' quibbles, but by the forging of sanctions to enforce the nation's will. To that end this Congress must address itself. Our weaknesses are many and are apparent enough. Mutual strife, even within Congress committees, is unhappily too common and election squabbles drain all our strength and energy. How can we fight a great fight if we cannot get over this ancient weakness of ours and rise above our petty selves? I earnestly hope that with a strong programme of action before the country our perspective will improve and we will not tolerate this barren and demoralizing strife.

What can this programme be? Our choice is limited, not by our own constitution, which we can change at our will, but by facts and circumstances. Article 1 of our constitution lays down that our methods must be legitimate and peaceful. Legitimate I hope they will always be, for we must not sully the great cause for which we stand by any deed that will bring dishonour to it and that we may ourselves regret later. Peaceful I should like them to be, for the methods of peace are more desirable and more enduring than those of violence. Violence too often brings reaction and demoralization in its train, and in our country specially it may lead to disruption. It is perfectly true that organized violence rules the world today, and it may be that we could profit by its use. But we have not the

material or the training for organized violence, and individual or sporadic violence is a confession of despair. The great majority of us, I take it, judge the issue not on moral but on practical grounds, and if we reject the way of violence it is because it promises no substantial results. But if this Congress or the nation at any future time comes to the conclusion that methods of violence will rid us of slavery then I have no doubt that it will adopt them. Violence is bad, but slavery is far worse. Let us also remember that the great apostle of non-violence has himself told us that it is better to fight than to refuse to fight out of cowardice.

Any great movement for liberation today must necessarily be a mass movement, and mass movements must essentially be peaceful, except in times of organized revolt. Whether we have the non-co-operation of a decade ago or the modern industrial weapon of the general strike, the basis is peaceful organization and peaceful action. And if the principal movement is a peaceful one contemporaneous attempts at sporadic violence can only distract attention and weaken it. It is not possible to carry on at one and the same time the two movements side by side. We have to choose and strictly to abide by our choice. What the choice of this Congress is likely to be I have no doubt. It can only choose a peaceful mass movement.

Should we repeat the programme and tactics of the non-co-operation movement? Not necessarily, but the basic idea must remain. Programmes and tactics must be made to fit in with circumstances, and it is neither easy nor desirable for this Congress at this stage to determine them in detail. That should be the work of its executive, the All-India Congress Committee. But the principles have to be fixed.

The old programme was one of the three boycotts—councils, law courts, and schools—leading up to refusal of service in the army and non-payment of taxes. When the national struggle is at its height I fail to see how it will be possible for any person engaged in it to continue in the courts or the schools. But still I think that it will be unwise to declare a boycott of the courts and schools at this stage.

The boycott of the legislative councils has led to much heated debate in the past, and this Congress itself has been rent in twain over it. We need not revive that controversy, for the circumstances today are entirely different. I feel that the step the Congress took some years ago to permit Congressmen to enter the councils was an inevitable step, and I am not prepared to say that some good has not resulted from it. But we have exhausted that good, and there is no middle course left today between boycott and full co-operation. All of us know the demoralization that these sham legislatures have

brought in our ranks, and how many of our good men their committees and commissions lure away. Our workers are limited in number, and we can have no mass movement unless they concentrate on it and turn their backs on the palatial council-chambers of our legislatures. And if we declare for independence, how can we enter the councils and carry on our humdrum and profitless activities there? No programme or policy can be laid down for ever, nor can this Congress bind the country or even itself to pursue one line of action indefinitely. But today I would respectfully urge the Congress that the only policy in regard to the councils is a complete boycott of them. The All-India Congress Committee has recommended this course, and the time has come to give effect to it.

Our programme must, therefore, be one of political and economic boycott. It is not possible for us, so long as we are not actually independent, and not even then completely, to boycott another country wholly or to sever all connection with it. But our endeavour must be to reduce all points of contact with the British Government and to rely on ourselves. We must also make it clear that India will not accept responsibility for all the debts that England has piled on her. The Gaya Congress repudiated liability to pay these debts, and we must repeat this repudiation and stand by it. Such of India's public debt as has been used for purposes beneficial to India we are prepared to admit and pay back. But we wholly deny all liability to pay back the vast sums which have been raised so that India may be held in subjection and her burdens may be increased. In particular, the poverty-stricken people of India cannot agree to shoulder the burden of the wars fought by England to extend her domain or consolidate her position in India. Nor can they accept the many concessions lavishly bestowed, without even proper compensation, on foreign exploiters.

This boycott will only be a means to an end. It will release energy and divert attention to the real struggle, which must take the shape of non-payment of taxes and, where possible, with the co-operation of the labour movement, general strikes. But non-payment of taxes must be well organized in specific areas, and for this purpose the Congress should authorize the All-India Congress Committee to take the necessary action wherever and whenever it considers desirable.

I have not, so far, referred to the constructive programme of the Congress. This should certainly continue, but the experience of the last few years shows us that by itself it does not carry us swiftly enough. It prepares the ground for future action, and ten years' silent work is bearing fruit today. In particular we shall, I hope,

continue our boycott of foreign cloth and the boycott of British goods.

I have not referred so far to the Indians overseas and I do not propose to say much about them. This is not from any want of fellow-feeling with our brethren in East Africa or South Africa or Fiji or elsewhere, who are bravely struggling against great odds. But their fate will be decided in the plains of India, and the struggle we are launching into is as much for them as for ourselves.

For this struggle we want efficient machinery. Our Congress constitution and organization have become too archaic and slow moving, and are ill suited to times of crisis. The times of great demonstrations are past. We want quiet and irresistible action now, and this can only be brought about by the strictest discipline in our ranks. Our resolutions must be passed in order to be acted upon. The Congress will gain in strength, however small its actual membership may become, if it acts in a disciplined way. Small determined minorities have changed the fate of nations. Mobs and crowds can do little. Freedom itself involves restraint and discipline, and each one of us will have to subordinate himself to the larger good.

The Congress represents no small minority in the country, and though many may be too weak to join it or to work for it, they look to it with hope and longing to bring them deliverance. Ever since the Calcutta resolution the country has waited with anxious expectation for this great day when this Congress meets. None of us can say what and when we can achieve. We cannot command success. But success often comes to those who dare and act; it seldom goes to the timid who are ever afraid of the consequences. We play for high stakes; and if we seek to achieve great things it can only be through great dangers. Whether we succeed soon or late, none but ourselves can stop us from high endeavour and from writing a noble page in our country's long and splendid history.

We have conspiracy cases going on in various parts of the country. They are ever with us. But the time has gone for secret conspiracy. We have now an Open Conspiracy to free this country from foreign rule and you, comrades, and all our countrymen and country-women are invited to join it. But the rewards that are in store for you are suffering and prison and, it may be, death. But you shall also have the satisfaction that you have done your little bit for India, the ancient, but ever young, and have helped a little in the liberation of humanity from its present bondage.

*Vande-Mataram!*  
(Hail to the Motherland!)

## CHAPTER II

*Whither India?*

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NEVER in the long range of history has the world been in such a state of flux as it is today. Never has there been so much anxious questioning, so much doubt and bewilderment, so much examining of old institutions, existing ills, and suggested remedies. There is a continuous process of change and revolution going on all over the world, and everywhere anxious statesmen are almost at their wits' end and grope about in the dark. It is obvious that we are a part of this great world problem, and must be affected by world events. And yet, judging from the attention paid to these events in India, one would not think so. Major events are recorded in the news columns of papers, but little attempt is made to see behind and beneath them, to understand the forces that are shaking and reforming the world before our eyes, to comprehend the essential nature of social, economic, and political reality. History, whether past or present, becomes just a magic show with little rhyme or reason, and with no lesson for us which might guide our future path. On the gaily-decked official stage of India or England phantom figures come and go, posing for a while as great statesmen; Round Tablers<sup>1</sup> flit about like pale shadows of those who created them, engaged in pitiful and interminable talk which interests few and affects an even smaller number. Their main concern is how to save the vested interests of various classes or groups; their main diversion, apart from feasting, is self-praise. Others, blissfully ignorant of all that has happened in the last half-century, still talk the jargon of the Victorian Age and are surprised and resentful that nobody listens to them. Even the Nasmyth hammer of war and revolution and world change has failed to produce the slightest dent on their remarkably hard heads. Yet others hide vested interests under cover of communalism or even nationalism. And then there is the vague but passionate nationalism of many who find present conditions intolerable and hunger for

<sup>1</sup> The Round Table Conference, 1930-33, met in London to consider Dominion Status for India. The Congress Party virtually boycotted it, sending Gandhi as its sole representative to the second session only.

national freedom without clearly realizing what form that freedom will take. And there are also here, as in many other countries, the usual accompaniments of a growing nationalism—an idealism, a mysticism, a feeling of exaltation, a belief in the mission of one's country, and something of the nature of religious revivalism. Essentially all these are middle-class phenomena.

Our politics must either be those of magic or of science. The former of course requires no argument or logic; the latter is in theory at least entirely based on clarity of thought and reasoning, and has no room for vague idealistic or religious or sentimental processes which confuse and befog the mind. Personally I have no faith in or use for the ways of magic and religion, and I can only consider the question on scientific grounds.

What, then, are we driving at? Freedom? Swaraj? Independence? Dominion Status? Words which may mean much or little or nothing at all. Again, whose freedom are we particularly striving for, for nationalism covers many sins and includes many conflicting elements? There is the feudal India of the princes, the India of the big zamindars, of small zamindars, of the professional classes, of the agriculturists, of the industrialists, of the bankers, of the lowermiddle class, of the workers. There are the interests of foreign capital and those of home capital, of foreign services and home services. The nationalist answer is to prefer home interests to foreign interests, but beyond that it does not go. It tries to avoid disturbing the class divisions or the social *status quo*. It imagines that the various interests will somehow be accommodated when the country is free. Being essentially a middle-class movement, nationalism works chiefly in the interests of that class. It is obvious that there are serious conflicts between various interests in the country, and every law, every policy which is good for one interest may be harmful for another. What is good for the Indian prince may be thoroughly bad for the people of his State, what is profitable for the zamindar may ruin many of his tenants, what is demanded by foreign capital may crush the rising industries of the country.

Nothing is more absurd than to imagine that all the interests in the nation can be fitted in without injury to any. At every step some have to be sacrificed for others. A currency policy may be good for creditors or debtors, not for both at the same time. Inflation, resulting in a reduction or even wiping off of debts, will be welcomed by all debtors and by industry as a rule, but cursed by bankers and those who have fixed incomes. Early in the nineteenth century England deliberately sacrificed her agriculture for her rising industry. In 1925, by insisting on keeping the value of the pound sterling at par

she sacrificed, to some extent, her industry to her banking and financial system, and faced industrial troubles and a huge general strike.

Any number of such instances can be given; they deal with the rival claims of different groups of the possessing classes. A more vital conflict of interests arises between these possessing classes as a whole and the others; between the Haves and Have-Nots. All this is obvious enough, but every effort is made to confuse the real issue by the holders of power, whether political or economic. The British Government is continually declaring before high heaven that they are trustees for our masses and India and England have common interests and can march hand in hand to a common destiny. Few people are taken in by this because nationalism makes us realize the inherent conflict between the two national interests. But nationalism does not make us realize the equally inherent and fundamental conflict between economic interests within the nation. There is an attempt to cover this up and avoid it on the ground that the national issue must be settled first. Appeals are issued for unity between different classes and groups to face the common national foe, and those who point out the inherent conflict between landlord and tenant, or capitalist and wage labourer, are criticized.

We may take it that the average person does not like conflict and continuous tension; he prefers peace and quiet, and is even prepared to sacrifice much for it. But the ostrich-like policy of refusing to see a conflict and a disorder which not only exist but are eating into society's vitals, to blind oneself to reality, will not end the conflict and the disorder, or suddenly change reality into unreality; for a politician or a man of action such a policy can only end in disaster. It is therefore essential that we keep this in mind and fashion our idea of freedom accordingly. We cannot escape having to answer the question, now or later, for the freedom of which class or classes in India are we especially striving? Do we place the masses, the peasantry and workers, first, or some other small class at the head of our list? Let us give the benefits of freedom to as many groups and classes as possible, but essentially whom do we stand for, and when a conflict arises whose side must we take? To say that we shall not answer that question now is itself an answer and taking of sides, for it means that we stand by the existing order, the *status quo*.

The form of government is after all a means to an end; even freedom itself is a means, the end being human well-being, human growth, the ending of poverty and disease and suffering, and the opportunity for every one to live the 'good life', physically and

mentally. What the 'good life' is is a matter we cannot go into here, but most people will agree that freedom is essential to it—national freedom so far as the nation is concerned, personal freedom so far as the individual is concerned. For every restriction and inhibition stops growth and development, and produces, apart from economic disorders, complexes and perversions in the nation and individual. So freedom is necessary. Equally necessary is the will and the capacity for co-operation. Modern life grows so complex, there is so much interdependence, that co-operation is the very breath that keeps it functioning.

The long course of history shows us a succession of different forms of government and changing economic forms of production and organization. The two fit in and shape and influence each other. When economic change goes ahead too fast and the forms of government remain more or less static, a hiatus occurs, which is usually bridged over by a sudden change called revolution. The tremendous importance of economic events in shaping history and forms of government is now almost universally admitted.

We are often told that there is a world of difference between the East and the West. The West is said to be materialistic, the East spiritual, religious, etc. What exactly the East signifies is seldom indicated, for the East includes the Bedouins of the Arabian deserts, the Hindus of India, the nomads of the Siberian Steppes, the pastoral tribes of Mongolia, the typically irreligious Confucians of China, and the Sumurai of Japan. There are tremendous national and cultural differences between the different countries of Asia as well as Europe; but there is no such thing as East and West except in the minds of those who wish to make this an excuse for imperialist domination, or those who have inherited such myths and fictions from a confused metaphysical past. Differences there are but they are chiefly due to different stages of economic growth.

We see, in north-western Europe, autocracy and feudalism giving place to the present capitalist order involving competition and large-scale production. The old small holdings disappear; the feudal checks on the serfs and cultivators go, and these agriculturists are also deprived of the little land they had. Large numbers of landless people are thrown out of employment and they have no land to fall back upon. A landless, propertyless proletariat is thus created. At the same time the checks and the controlled prices of the limited markets of feudal times disappear, and the open market appears. Ultimately this leads to the world market, the characteristic feature of capitalism.

Capitalism builds up on the basis of the landless proletariat, which could be employed as wage labourers in the factories, and the open market, where the machine-made goods could be sold. It grows rapidly and spreads all over the world. In the producing countries it was an active and living capitalism; in the colonial and consuming countries it was just a passive consumption of the goods made by machine industry in the West. North-western Europe, and a little later North America, exploit the resources of the world; they exploit Asia, Africa, East Europe, and South America. They add vastly to the wealth of the world, but this wealth is largely concentrated in a few nations and a few hands.

In this growth of capitalism, dominion over India was of vital importance to England. India's gold, in the early stages, helped in the further industrialization of England. And then India became a great producer of raw material to feed the factories of England and a huge market to consume the goods made in these factories. England, in her passionate desire to accumulate wealth, sacrificed her agriculture to her industry. England became almost a kind of vast city, and India the rural area attached to her.

The concentration of wealth in fewer hands went on. But the exploitation of India and other countries brought so much wealth to England that some of it trickled down to the working class and their standards of living rose. Working-class agitations were controlled and soothed by concessions from the capitalist owners, which they could well afford from the profits of imperialist exploitation. Wages rose; hours of work went down; there were insurance and other welfare schemes for the workers. A general prosperity in England took the edge off working-class discontent.

In India, passive industrialization meant an ever-growing burden on land. She became just a consumer of foreign machine-made goods. Her own cottage industries were partly destroyed forcibly, and partly by economic forces, and nothing took their place. All the ingredients and conditions for industrialization were present, but England did not encourage this, and indeed tried to prevent it by taxing machinery. And so the burden on the land grew and with it unemployment and poverty, and there was a progressive ruralization of India.

But the processes of history and economics cannot be stopped for long. Although general poverty was increasing, small groups accumulated some capital and wanted fields for investment. And so machine industry grew in India, partly with Indian capital, very much more so with foreign capital. Indian capital was largely dependent on foreign capital, and, in particular, could be controlled by the foreign

banking system. It is well known that the World War<sup>1</sup> gave a great push to Indian industry and afterwards, for reasons of imperial policy, England changed her policy towards Indian industry and began to encourage it, but mostly with foreign capital. The growth of so-called swadeshi industries in India thus represented to a very great extent the increasing hold of British capital on India.

The growth of industries and nationalist movements in all the countries of the East checked Western exploitation, and the profits of Western capitalism began to go down. War debts and other consequences of the war were a tremendous burden for all the countries concerned. There was not so much money or profits of industry to be distributed to the working class in the West, and the discontent and pressure of the workers grew. There was also the living incentive and inspiration of the Russian Revolution for the workers.

Meanwhile two other processes were working silently but with great rapidity. One was the concentration of wealth and industrial power in fewer hands by the formation of huge trusts, cartels, and combines. The other was a continuous improvement in technique in the methods of production, leading to greater mechanization, far greater production, and more unemployment as workers were replaced by machinery. And this led to a curious result. Just when industry was producing goods on the biggest mass scale in history, there were few people to buy them, as the great majority were too poor to be able to afford them. The armies of the unemployed were not earning anything, so how could they spend? And even the majority of those earning had little to spare. A new truth suddenly dawned on the perplexed minds of the great captains of industry (this dawning process has not yet taken place among the leaders of industry in India), and the truth was this: that mass production necessitates mass consumption. But if the masses have no money how are they to buy or consume? And what of production then? So production is stopped or restricted and the wheels of industry slow down till they barely move. Unemployment grows all the more, and this again makes consumption diminish.

This is the crisis of capitalism which has had the world by the throat for over four years.<sup>2</sup> Essentially it is due to the ill distribution of the world's wealth; to its concentration in a few hands. And the disease seems to be of the essence of capitalism and grows with it till it eats and destroys the very system which created it. There is no lack of money in the world, no lack of foodstuffs, or the many other

<sup>1</sup> i.e. 1914-18.

<sup>2</sup> i.e. since the beginning of the Great Depression in 1929. This article first appeared in 1933.

things that man requires. The world is richer today than it has ever been, and holds promise of untold advance in the near future. And yet the system breaks down, and while millions starve and endure privation huge quantities of foodstuffs and other articles are destroyed, insect pests are let loose on the fields to destroy crops, harvests are not gathered, and nations meet together to confer how to restrict future crops of wheat and cotton and tea and coffee and many other articles. From the beginning of history man has fought with nature to get the barest necessities of life, and now that nature's wealth is poured out before him, enough to remove poverty for ever from the world, his only way of dealing with it is to burn and destroy it, and become poorer and more destitute in the process.

History has never offered a more amazing paradox. It seems clear enough that the capitalist system of industry, whatever its services in the past may have been, is no longer suited to the present methods of production. Technical advance has gone far ahead of the existing social structure, and, as in the past, this hiatus causes most of our present-day disorders. Till that lag is made up and a new system in keeping with the new technique is adopted, the disorders are likely to continue. The change over to the new system is of course opposed by those who have vested interests in the old system, and though this old system is dying before their eyes they prefer to hold on to their little rather than share a lot with others.

It is not, fundamentally, a moral issue, as some people imagine, although there is a moral side to it. It is not a question of blaming capitalism or cursing capitalists and the like. Capitalism has been of the greatest service to the world, and individual capitalists are but tiny wheels in the big machine. The question now is whether the capitalist system has not outlived its day and must now give place to a better and a saner ordering of human affairs, which is more in keeping with the progress of science and human knowledge.

In India, during this period, the tremendous burden on land continued and even increased, despite the growth of industry in certain areas. Economic discontent increased. The middle class grew up and, finding no sufficient scope for self-development, demanded political changes and took to agitation. More or less similar causes worked all over the colonial and dependent East. Especially after the war, national movements grew rapidly in Egypt and most of the countries of Asia. These movements were essentially due to the distress of the masses and the lower middle classes. There was a strange similarity even in the methods employed by these movements—non-co-operation, boycotts of legislatures, boycotts of goods, *hartals*, strikes, etc. Occasionally there were violent out-

breaks, as in Egypt and Syria, but stress was laid far more on peaceful methods. In India, of course, non-violence was made a basic principle by the Congress at the suggestion of Gandhiji.<sup>1</sup> All these national struggles for freedom have continued till now, and they are bound to continue till a solution of the basic problem is found. Fundamentally, this solution is not merely a question of satisfying the natural desire for self-rule, but one of filling hungry stomachs.

The great revolutionary nationalist urge in Asia of the after-war years gradually exhausted itself for the time being and conditions stabilized themselves. In India this took the form of the Swarajist entry into the Assembly and the Councils. In Europe also the middle nineteen-twenties was a period of settling down and adaptation to the new conditions created by the World War. The revolution that had hovered all over Europe in 1919 and 1920 failed to come off and receded into the background. American gold poured into Europe and revived to some extent the war-weary and disillusioned peoples of that continent, and created a false appearance of prosperity. But this prosperity had no real basis and the crash came in 1929, when the United States of America stopped lending money to Europe and South America. Many factors, and especially the inherent conflicts of a declining capitalism, contributed to this crash, and the house of cards of after-war capitalist prosperity began to tumble down. That process of tumbling down has been going on at a tremendous pace for four years, and there is no end to it yet. It is called the slump, trade depression, the crisis, etc., but it is really the evening of the capitalist system, and the world is being compelled by circumstances to recognize this. International trade is reaching vanishing point, international co-operation has failed, the world-market which was the essential basis of capitalism is disappearing, and each nation is trying frantically to shift for itself at the cost of others. Whatever the future may bring, one thing is certain: that the old order has gone and all the king's horses and all the king's men will not set it up again.

As the old capitalist order has tottered the challenge to it by the growing forces of labour has grown more intense. This challenge, when it has become dangerous, has induced the possessing classes to sink their petty differences and band themselves together to fight the common foe. This has led to Fascism and, in its milder forms, to the formation of so-called national governments. Essentially, these are the last ditch efforts of the possessing classes, or the 'kept

<sup>1</sup> Here, as in some other places, Nehru gives Gandhi the familiar Indian title 'Gandhiji'. The 'ji' denotes respect, and is almost comparable to 'Mr.'

classes' as they have been called by an American economist, to hold on to what they have. The struggle becomes more intense and the forms of nineteenth-century democracy are discarded. But Fascism or national governments offer no solution of the fundamental economic inconsistencies of the present-day capitalist system, and so long as they do not remove the inequalities of wealth and solve the problem of distribution they are doomed to fail. Of the major capitalist countries the United States of America is the only place where some attempt is being made today towards lessening to a slight extent inequalities in wealth by State action. Carried to a logical conclusion, President Roosevelt's programme<sup>1</sup> will lead to a form of State Socialism; it is far more likely that the effort will fail and result in Fascism. England, as is her habit, is grimly muddling through and waiting for something to happen. Meanwhile she has derived considerable help from India's gold and resources. But all this is temporary relief only and the nations slide downhill and approach the brink.

Thus, if we survey the world today, we find that capitalism, having solved the problem of production, helplessly faces the allied problem of distribution and is unable to solve it. It was not in the nature of the capitalist system to deal satisfactorily with distribution, and production alone makes the world top-heavy and unbalanced. To find a solution for distributing wealth and purchasing power evenly is to put an end to the basic inequalities of the capitalist system and to replace capitalism itself by a more scientific system.

Capitalism has led to imperialism and to the conflicts of imperialist powers in search for colonial areas for exploitation, for areas of raw produce and for markets for manufactured goods. It has led to ever-increasing conflicts with the rising nationalism of colonial countries, and to social conflicts with powerful movements of the exploited working class. It has resulted in recurrent crises, political and economic, leading to economic and tariff wars as well as political wars on an enormous scale. Every subsequent crisis is on a bigger scale than the previous one, and now we live in a perpetual state of crisis and slump and the shadow of war darkens the horizon.

And yet it is well to remember that the world today has a surfeit of food and the other good things in life. Terrible want exists because the present system does not know how to distribute them. Repeated international conferences have failed to find a way out because they represented the claims of vested interests and dared not touch the system itself. They grope blindly in the dark in their stuffy rooms

<sup>1</sup> The 'New Deal', with its federal agencies for promoting economic projects and for alleviating distress.

while the foundations of the house they built are being sapped by the advance of science and economic events. Everywhere thinkers have recognized the utter inadequacy of the existing system, though they have differed as to the remedies. Communists and Socialists point with confidence to the way of Socialism and they are an ever-growing power for they have science and logic on their side. In America a great stir was caused by the Technocrats, a group of engineers who want to do away with money itself and to substitute for it a unit of energy, an erg. In England the social credit theories of Major Douglas, according to which the whole production of the nation will be evenly distributed to the whole population—a kind of 'dividends for all'—find increasing acceptance.<sup>1</sup> Barter takes the place of trade both in the domestic and the international market. The growth of these revolutionary theories even among the well-to-do classes, and especially the intellectuals, is in itself an indication of the tremendous change in mentality that is taking place in the world. How many of us can conceive a world without money and with the invisible erg as its measure of value? And yet this is soberly and earnestly advocated not by wild agitators but by well-known economists and engineers.

This is the world background.

The Asiatic background is intimately related to this and yet it has its peculiar features. Asia is the main field of conflict between nationalism and imperialism. Asia is still undeveloped as compared to Europe and North America. It has a vast population which can consume goods if they had the necessary purchasing power to do so. To the hard-pressed imperialist Powers seeking frantically for areas of economic expansion, Asia still offers a field, though nationalism offers many obstructions. Hence the talk of a 'push to Asia' to find an outlet for the surplus goods of the West and thus stabilize Western capitalism for another period. Capitalism is a young and growing force in the East; it has not, as in India, wholly overthrown feudalism yet. But even before capitalism had established itself other forces, inimical to it, have risen to challenge it. And it is obvious that if capitalism collapses in Europe and America it cannot survive in Asia.

Nationalism is still the strongest force in Asia (we can ignore for our present purpose the Soviet territories of Asia). This is natural as a country under alien domination must inevitably think first in terms of nationalism. But the powerful economic forces working

<sup>1</sup> In 1937 an attempt to put them into practice was made in the province of Alberta, Canada, but the Supreme Court declared it unconstitutional, and the Privy Council agreed.

for change in the world today have influenced this nationalism to an ever-increasing extent, and everywhere it is appearing in Socialistic garb. Gradually the nationalist struggle for political freedom is becoming a social struggle also for economic freedom. Independence and Socialist State become the objectives, with varying degrees of stress being laid on the two aspects of the problem. As political freedom is delayed, the other aspect assumes greater importance, and it now seems probable, especially because of world conditions, that political and social emancipation will come together to some at least of the countries of Asia.

That is the Asiatic background.

In India, as in other Asiatic colonial countries, we find a struggle today between the old nationalist ideology and the new economic ideology. Most of us have grown up under the nationalist tradition, and it is hard to give up the mental habits of a lifetime. And yet we realize that this outlook is inadequate; it does not fit in with existing conditions in our country or in the world; there is a hiatus, a lag. We try to bridge this hiatus, but the process of crossing over to a new ideology is always a painful one. Many of us are confused and perplexed today because of this. But the crossing has to be made, unless we are to remain in a stagnant backwater, overwhelmed from time to time by the wash of the boats that move down the river of progress. We must realize that the nineteenth century cannot solve the problems of the twentieth, much less can the seventh century or earlier ages do so.

Having glanced at the general background of Asia and the world we can have a clearer view of our own national problem. India's freedom affects each one of us intimately, and we are apt to look upon it as a thing apart and unconnected with world events. But the Indian problem is a part of the Asiatic problem and is tied up with the problems of the world. We cannot, even if we will it, separate it from the rest. What happens in India will affect the world and world events will change India's future. Indeed it may be said that the three great world problems today are: the fate of capitalism, which means the fate of Europe and America, the future of India, and the future of China, and all these are interrelated.

India's struggle today is part of the great struggle which is going on all over the world for the emancipation of the oppressed. Essentially, this is an economic struggle, with hunger and want as its driving forces, although it puts on nationalist and other dresses.

Indian freedom is necessary because the burden on the Indian masses as well as the middle classes is too heavy to be borne, and must be lightened or done away with. The measure of freedom is the

extent to which this burden is removed. This burden is due to the vested interests of a foreign government as well as those of certain groups and classes in India and abroad. The achievement of freedom thus becomes a question, as Gandhiji said recently, of divesting vested interests. If an indigenous government took the place of the foreign government and kept all the vested interests intact, this would not even be the shadow of freedom.

We have got into an extraordinary habit of thinking of freedom in terms of paper constitutions. Nothing could be more absurd than this lawyer's mentality which ignores life and the vital economic issues and can only proceed on the basis of the *status quo* and precedents. Too much reliance on past practice has somehow succeeded in twisting the lawyer's head backwards and he seems to be incapable of looking ahead. Even the halt and the lame go slowly forward; not so the lawyer who is convinced, like the fanatic in religion, that truth can only lie in the past.

The Round Table scheme is almost as dead as Queen Anne and hardly deserves notice. It was not meant to give an iota of freedom to the Indian people; it sought to win over certain Indian vested interests to the British side and in this it succeeded. It answered, to the satisfaction of its votaries, the question I had formulated at the beginning of this essay: whose freedom are we striving for? It gave greater protection and assurance and freedom to the British vested interests in India. It was Home Rule for the Viceroy, as Mr Vithalbhai Patel said. It confirmed the interests of British capital and British services and, in some cases, gave them even more than they have now. It tried to perpetuate the alien military occupation of India. Further, it gave greater freedom and importance to the vested interests of the princes and the semi-feudal magnates. In brief, the whole scheme was meant for the protection and perpetuation of the numerous vested interests that exploit the Indian masses. Having done this useful and, to themselves, profitable piece of work, the originators of the scheme told us that autonomy was a costly affair and would mean the expenditure of many extra millions for each province! Thus not only were all the old burdens on the masses to be continued, but many new ones were to be added. This was the ingenious solution discovered by the wise and learned men who foregathered at the Round Table Conference. Intent on protecting their class privileges they happened to forget an odd three hundred and fifty million people in India.

Even a child in politics can point out the folly of this procedure. The whole basis and urge of the national movement came from a desire for economic betterment, to throw off the burdens that

crushed the masses, and to end the exploitation of the Indian people. If these burdens continue and are actually added to, it does not require a powerful mind to realize that the fight must not only continue but grow more intense. Leaders and individuals may come and go; they may get tired and slacken off; they may compromise or betray; but the exploited and suffering masses must carry on the struggle, for their drill-sergeant is hunger. Swaraj or freedom from exploitation for them is not a fine paper constitution or a problem of the hereafter. It is a question of the here and now, of immediate relief. Roast lamb and mint sauce may be a tasty dish for those who eat it, but the poor lamb is not likely to appreciate the force of the best of arguments which point out the beauty of sacrifice for the good of the elect and the joys of close communion, even though dead, with mint sauce.

India's immediate goal can therefore only be considered in terms of the ending of the exploitation of her people. Politically, it must mean independence and the severance of the British connection, which means imperialist dominion; economically and socially it must mean the ending of all special class privileges and vested interests. The whole world is struggling to this end; India can do no less, and in this way the Indian struggle for freedom lines up with the world struggle. Is our aim human welfare or the preservation of class privileges and the vested interests of pampered groups? The question must be answered clearly and unequivocally by each one of us. There is no room for quibbling when the fate of nations and millions of human beings is at stake. The day for palace intrigues and parlour politics and pacts and compromises passes when the masses enter politics. Their manners are not those of the drawing-room; we never took the trouble to teach them any manners. Their school is the school of events and suffering is their teacher. They learn their politics from great movements which bring out the true nature of individuals and classes, and the civil disobedience movement has taught the Indian masses many a lesson which they will never forget.

Independence is a much-abused word and it hardly connotes what we are driving at. And yet there is no other suitable word and, for want of a better, we must use it. National isolation is neither a desirable nor a possible ideal in a world which is daily becoming more of a unit. International and intranational activities dominate the world and nations are growing more and more interdependent. Our ideal and objective cannot go against this historical tendency, and we must be prepared to discard a narrow nationalism in favour of world co-operation and real internationalism. Independence there-

fore cannot mean for us isolation but freedom from all imperialist control, and because Britain represents imperialism, our freedom can only come after the British connection is severed. We have no quarrel with the British people, but between British imperialism and Indian freedom there is no meeting ground and there can be no peace. If imperialism goes from Britain we shall gladly co-operate with her in the wider international field; not otherwise.

British statesmen of the Liberal and Labour variety often point out to us the ills of a narrow nationalism and dwell on the virtues of what used to be known as the British Empire and is now euphemistically called the British Commonwealth of Nations. Under cover of fine and radical words and phrases they seek to hide the ugly and brutal face of imperialism and try to keep us in its embrace of death. Some Indian public men, who ought to know better, also praise the virtues of internationalism, meaning thereby the British Empire, and tell us in sorrow how narrow-minded we are in demanding independence, in place of that wonderful thing (which nobody offers us) Dominion Status. The British, it is well known, have a remarkable capacity for combining their moral instincts with their self-interest. That is perhaps not unnatural, but it is remarkable how some of our own countrymen are taken in by this unctuous and hypocritical attitude. Even the light of day is wasted on those who keep their eyes shut. It is worth noting, however, that the foreign policy of England has been the greatest stumbling-block to international co-operation through the League of Nations or otherwise. All the European and American world knows this, but most of us, who look at foreign politics through English spectacles, have not grasped this fact yet. Disarmament, air-bombing, the attitude to the Manchurian question,<sup>1</sup> are some of the witnesses to England's attitude. Even the Kellogg-Briand Pact<sup>2</sup> of Paris, which was to have outlawed war, was only accepted by England subject to certain qualifications and reservations regarding her empire, which effectively nullified the Pact. The British Empire and real internationalism are as the poles apart, and it is not through that empire that we can march to internationalism.

The real question before us, and before the whole world, is one of fundamental change of régime politically, economically, socially. Only thus can we put India on the road to progress and stop the progressive deterioration of our country. In a revolutionary period,

<sup>1</sup> In 1932 this province of China became a puppet state of Japan under the name Manchukuo. But it was never recognized by any except the anti-Comintern nations, Japan, Germany, Italy, and Spain. See also p. 57.

<sup>2</sup> Signed in 1928 by almost all the nations of the world.

it is foolish waste of energy to think and act in terms of carrying on the existing régime and trying to reform it and improve it. To do so is to waste the opportunity which history offers once in a long while. 'The whole world is in revolution,' says Mussolini. 'Events themselves are a tremendous force pushing us on like some implacable will.' Individuals, however eminent, play but a minor role when the world is on the move. They may divert the main current here and there to some slight extent; they may not and cannot stop the rushing torrent. And therefore the only peace that can endure is with circumstances, not merely with men.

Whither India? Surely to the great human goal of social and economic equality, to the ending of all exploitation of nation by nation and class by class, to national freedom within the framework of an international co-operative Socialist world federation. This is not such an empty idealist dream as some people imagine. It is within the range of the practical politics of today and the near future. We may not have it within our grasp, but those with vision can see it emerging on the horizon. And even if there be delay in the realization of our goal, what does it matter if our steps march in the right direction and our eyes look steadily in front? For in the pursuit itself of a mighty purpose there is joy and happiness and a measure of achievement. As Bernard Shaw has said: "This is the true joy in life, the being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one; the being thoroughly worn out before you are thrown on the scrapheap; the being a force of nature, instead of a feverish, selfish little clod of ailments and grievances, complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy."

## CHAPTER III

*Presidential Address to the National Congress,  
Lucknow, April 1936*

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AFTER many years I face you again from this tribune—many weary years of strife and turmoil and common suffering. It is good for us to meet again; it is good for me to see this great host of old com-

rades and friends, linked together by strong bonds that cannot break, to sense the old brave spirit yet again, to feel your overwhelming kindness and goodwill to one whose greatest privilege it is to have been a comrade and a soldier with all of you in a mighty struggle for freedom. I am heartened and strengthened by you, though even in this great gathering I feel a little lonely. Many a dear comrade and friend has left us, worn out, long before the normal length of our earthly days, by the stress and strain of conflict. One by one they go, leaving a void in our hearts and a dull misery in our minds. They find peace from this turmoil perhaps, and it is well, for they deserved it. They rest after their labours.

But what of us who remain behind with a heavier burden to carry? There is no rest for us or for those who languish in prison or in detention camp. We cannot rest, for rest is betrayal of those who have gone and in going handed the torch of freedom to us to keep alight; it is betrayal of the cause we have espoused and the pledge we have taken; it is betrayal of the millions who never rest.

Most of you must know my views on social and economic matters, for I have often given expression to them. Yet you chose me as president. I do not take that choice to mean an endorsement by you all, or by a majority, of those views, but I take it that this does mean that those views are spreading in India and that most of you will be so indulgent as at least to consider them.

I am convinced that the only key to the solution of the world's problems and of India's problems lies in Socialism, and when I use this word I do so not in a vague humanitarian way but in the scientific, economic sense. Socialism is, however, something even more than an economic doctrine; it is a philosophy of life and as such also it appeals to me. I see no way of ending the poverty, the vast unemployment, the degradation, and the subjection of the Indian people except through Socialism. That involves vast and revolutionary changes in our political and social structure, the ending of vested interests in land and industry, as well as the feudal and autocratic Indian States system. That means the ending of private property, except in a restricted sense, and the replacement of the present profit system by a higher ideal of co-operative service. It means ultimately a change in our instincts and habits and desires. In short, it means a new civilization, radically different from the present capitalist order. Some glimpse we can have of this new civilization in the territories of the USSR. Much has happened there which has pained me greatly and with which I disagree, but I look upon that great and fascinating unfolding of a new order and a new civilization as the most promising feature of our dismal age. If the

future is full of hope it is largely because of Soviet Russia and what it has done, and I am convinced that, if some world catastrophe does not intervene, this new civilization will spread to other lands and put an end to the wars and conflicts which capitalism feeds.

I do not know how or when this new order will come to India. I imagine that every country will fashion it after its own way and fit it in with its national genius. But the essential basis of that order must remain and be a link in the world order that will emerge out of the present chaos.

Socialism is thus for me not merely an economic doctrine which I favour; it is a vital creed which I hold with all my head and heart. I work for Indian independence because the nationalist in me cannot tolerate alien domination; I work for it even more because for me it is the inevitable step to social and economic change. I should like the Congress to become a Socialist organization and to join hands with the other forces in the world who are working for the new civilization. But I realize that the majority in the Congress, may not be prepared to go thus far. We are a nationalist organization, and we think and work on the nationalist plane. It is evident enough now that this is too narrow even for the limited objective of political independence, and so we talk of the masses and their economic needs. But still most of us hesitate, because of our nationalist backgrounds, to take a step which might frighten away some vested interests. Most of those interests are already ranged against us, and we can expect little from them except opposition even in the political struggle.

Much as I wish for the advancement of Socialism in this country, I have no desire to force the issue in the Congress and thereby create difficulties in the way of our struggle for independence. I shall co-operate gladly and with all the strength in me with all those who work for independence, even though they do not agree with the Socialist solution. But I shall do so stating my position frankly and hoping in course of time to convert the Congress and the country to it, for only thus can I see it achieving independence. It should surely be possible for all of us who believe in independence to join our ranks together even though we might differ on the social issue. The Congress has been in the past a broad front representing various opinions joined together by that common bond. It must continue as such even though the difference of those opinions becomes more marked.

How does Socialism fit in with the present ideology of the Congress? I do not think it does. I believe in the rapid industrialization of the country and only thus I think will the standards of the people

rise substantially and poverty be combated. Yet I have co-operated wholeheartedly in the past with the khadi programme, and I hope to do so in the future because I believe that khadi and village industries have a definite place in our present economy. They have a social, a political, and an economic value which is difficult to measure but which is apparent enough to those who have studied their effects. But I look upon them more as temporary expedients of a transition stage rather than as solutions of our vital problems. That transition stage might be a long one, and in a country like India, village industries might well play an important, though subsidiary, role even after the development of industrialism. But though I co-operate in the village industries programme my ideological approach to it differs considerably from that of many others in the Congress who are opposed to industrialization and Socialism.

The problem of untouchability and the Harijans, again, can be approached in different ways. For a Socialist it presents no difficulty, for under Socialism there can be no such differentiation or victimization. Economically speaking, the Harijans have constituted the landless proletariat, and an economic solution removes the social barriers that custom and tradition have raised.

I come now to a question which is probably occupying you minds—the new Act<sup>1</sup> passed by the British Parliament and our policy in regard to it. This Act has come into being since the last Congress met, but even at that time we had had a foretaste of it in the shape of the White Paper, and I know of no abler analysis of those provisions than that contained in the presidential address of my predecessor in this high office. The Congress rejected that proposed constitution, and resolved to have nothing to do with it. The new Act, as is well known, is an even more retrograde measure, and has been condemned by even the most moderate and cautious of our politicians. If we rejected the White Paper, what then are we to do with this new charter of slavery to strengthen the bonds of imperialist domination and to intensify the exploitation of our masses? And even if we forget its content for a while, can we forget the insult and injury that have accompanied it, the contemptuous defiance of our wishes, the suppression of civil liberties, and the widespread repression that has been our normal lot? If they had offered to us the crown of heaven with this accompaniment and with dishonour, would we not have spurned it as inconsistent

<sup>1</sup> The Government of India Act of 1935 provided a federal form of government with provincial autonomy, but with reservations of power at the centre, a safeguard for minorities, etc., that fell far short of Congress expectations.

with our national honour and self-respect? What, then, of this?

A charter of slavery is no law for the slave, and though we may force submit for a while to it and to the humiliation of ordinances and the like, inherent in that enforced submission is the right and the desire to rebel against it and to end it.

Our lawyers have examined this new constitution and have condemned it. But constitutions are something much more than legal documents. 'The real constitution,' said Ferdinand Lassalle, consists of 'the actual relationships of power,' and the working of this power we see even today, after the Act has been passed. That is the constitution we have to face, not the fine phrases which are sometimes presented to us, and we can only deal with it with the strength and power generated by the people of the country.

To this Act our attitude can only be one of uncompromising hostility and a constant endeavour to end it. How can we do this?

All of us have agreed that the Act has to be rejected and combated, but all of us have not been able to agree to the manner of doing so. I think that, under the circumstances, we have no choice but to contest the election to the new provincial legislatures in the event of their taking place. We should seek election on the basis of a detailed political and economic programme, with our demand for a Constituent Assembly in the forefront. I am convinced that the only solution of our political and communal problems will come through such an Assembly, provided it is elected on an adult franchise and a mass basis. That Assembly will not come into existence till at least a semi-revolutionary situation has been created in this country and the actual relationships of power, apart from paper constitutions, are such that the people of India can make their will felt. When that will happen I cannot say, but the world is too much in the grip of dynamic forces today to admit of static conditions in India or elsewhere for long. We may thus have to face this issue sooner than we might expect. But, obviously, a Constituent Assembly will not come through the new Act or the new legislatures. Yet we must press this demand and keep it before our country and the world, so that when the time comes we may be ripe for it.

A Constituent Assembly is the only proper and democratic method for the framing of our constitution, and for its delegates then to negotiate a treaty with the representatives of the British Government. But we cannot go to it with blank minds in the hope that something good will emerge out of it. Such an Assembly, in order to be fruitful, must have previous thought behind it and a definite scheme put forward by an organized group. The actual details, as to how the Assembly is to be convened, must depend on

the circumstances then existing and need not trouble us now. But it will be our function as the Congress to know exactly what we are after, to place this clearly and definitely before the Assembly, and to press for its acceptance.

One of the principal reasons for our seeking election will be to carry the message of the Congress to the millions of voters and to the scores of millions of the disfranchised, to acquaint them with our future programme and policy, to make the masses realize that we not only stand for them but that we are of them and seek to co-operate with them in removing their social and economic burdens. Our appeal and message will not be limited to the voters, for we must remember that hundreds of millions are disfranchised and they need our help most, for they are at the bottom of the social ladder and suffer most from exploitation. We have seen in the past widespread official interference in the elections; we shall have to face that, as well as the serried and monied ranks of the reactionaries. But the real danger will come from our toning down our programme and policy in order to win over the hesitating and compromising groups and individuals. If we compromise on principles, we shall fall between two stools and deserve our fall. The only right way and the only safe way is to stand four-square on our own programme and to compromise with no one who has opposed the national struggle for freedom in the past, or who is in any way giving support to British imperialism.

When we have survived the election, what then are we to do? Office or no office? A secondary matter, perhaps, and yet behind that issue lie deep questions of principle and vital differences of outlook, and a decision on that, either way, has far-reaching consequences. Behind it lies, somewhat hidden, the question of independence itself and whether we seek revolutionary changes in India or are working for petty reforms under the aegis of British imperialism. We go back again in thought to the clash of ideas which preceded the changes in the Congress in 1920. We made a choice then deliberately and with determination, and discarded the old sterile creed of reformism. Are we to go back again to that blind and suffocating lane, after all these years of brave endeavour, and to wipe out the memory of what we have done and achieved and suffered? That is the issue, and let none of us forget it when we have to give our decision. In this India, crying aloud for radical and fundamental change, in this world pregnant with revolutionary and dynamic possibility, are we to forget our mission and our historic destiny, and slide back to static futility? And if some of us feel tired and hunger for rest and quiet, do we imagine that India's

masses will follow our lead, when elemental forces and economic necessity are driving them to their inevitable goal? If we enter the backwaters, others will take our place on the bosom of the flowing stream and will dare to take the rapids and ride the torrent.

How has this question arisen? If we express our hostility to the Act and reject the entire scheme, does it not follow logically that we should have nothing to do with the working of it and should prevent its functioning, in so far as we can? To accept office and ministry, under the conditions of the Act, is to negative our rejection of it and to stand self-condemned. National honour and self-respect cannot accept this position, for it would inevitably mean our co-operation in some measure with the repressive apparatus of imperialism, and we would become partners in this repression and in the exploitation of our people. Of course, we would try to champion the rights of the people and would protest against repression, but as ministers under the Act, we could do very little to give relief, and we would have to share responsibility for the administration with the apparatus of imperialism, for the deficit budgets, for the suppression of labour and the peasantry. It is always dangerous to assume responsibility without power, even in democratic countries; it will be far worse with this undemocratic constitution, hedged in with safeguards and reserved powers and mortgaged funds, where we have to follow the rules and regulations of our opponents' making. Imperialism sometimes talks of co-operation, but the kind of co-operation it wants is generally known as surrender, and the ministers who accept office will have to do so at the price of surrender of much that they might have stood for in public. That is a humiliating position which self-respect itself should prevent one from accepting. For our great national organization to be party to it is to give up the very basis and background of our existence.

Self-respect apart, common sense tells us that we can lose much and gain little by acceptance of office in terms of the Act. We cannot get much out of it, or else our criticism of the Act itself is wrong, and we know that it is not so. The big things for which we stand will fade into the background and petty issues will absorb our attention, and we shall lose ourselves in compromises and communal tangles, and disillusion with us will spread over the land. If we have a majority, and only then can the question of acceptance of office arise, we shall be in a position to dominate the situation and to prevent reactionaries and imperialists from profiting by it. Office will not add to our real strength, it will only weaken us by making us responsible for many things that we utterly dislike.

Again, if we are in a minority, the question of office does not arise.

It may be, however, that we are on the verge of a majority and with the co-operation of other individuals and groups we can obtain office. There is nothing inherently wrong in our acting together with others on specific issues of civil liberty or economic or other demands, provided we do not compromise on any principle. But I can imagine few things more dangerous and more likely to injure us than the acceptance of office on the sufferance of others. That would be an intolerable position.

It is said that our chances at the elections would increase if we announced that we were prepared to accept offices and ministries. Perhaps that might be so, for all manner of other people, eager for the spoils and patronage that office gives, would then hurry to join us. Does any Congressman imagine that this would be a desirable development or that we would gain strength thereby? Again it is said that more voters would vote for us if they knew that we were going to form ministries. That might happen if we deluded them with false promises of what we might do for them within the Act, but a quick nemesis would follow our failure to give effect to those promises, and failure would be inevitable if the promises were worth while.

There is only one straight course open to us, to go to the people with our programme and make it clear to them that we cannot give effect to the major items in it under present conditions, and therefore, while we use the platform of the legislatures to press that programme, we seek to end these imperialist bodies by creating deadlocks in them whenever we are in a position to do so. Those deadlocks should preferably take place on those programmes so that the masses might learn how ineffective for their purposes are these legislatures.

One fact is sometimes forgotten—the provision for second chambers in many of the provinces. These chambers will be reactionary and will be exploited by the Governor to check any forward tendencies in the lower house. They will make the position of a minister, who seeks advance, even more difficult and unenviable.

Some people have suggested, though their voices are hushed now, that provincial autonomy might be given on this office issue and each Provincial Congress Committee should be empowered to decide it for its own province. An astonishing and fatal suggestion playing into the hands of our imperialist rulers. We who have laboured for Indian unity can never be parties to any proposal which tends to lessen that unity. That way lies disaster and a disruption of the forces working for freedom. If we agree to this, why then should we also not agree to the communal issue being decided provincially,

or many other issues, where individual provinces might think differently? First issues will sink into the background, independence itself will fade away, and the narrowest provincialism raise its ugly head. Our policy must be uniform for the whole of India, and it must place first things first, and independence is the first thing of all.

So that I am convinced that for the Congress to favour the acceptance of office, or even to hesitate and waver about it, would be a vital error. It will be a pit from which it would be difficult for us to come out. Practical statesmanship is against it, as well as the traditions of the Congress and the mentality we have sought to develop in the people. Psychologically, any such lead might have disastrous consequences. If we stand for revolutionary changes, as we do, we have to cultivate a revolutionary mentality among our people, and anything that goes against it is harmful to our cause.

This psychological aspect is important. For we must never forget, and never delude our masses into imagining that we can get any real power or real freedom through working these legislatures. We may use them certainly to advance our cause to some extent, but the burden of the struggle for freedom must fall on the masses, and primarily, therefore, our effective work must lie outside these legislatures. Strength will come from the masses and from our work among them and our organization of them.

Of secondary importance though the work in the legislatures is, we may not treat it casually and allow it to become a hindrance to our other work. Therefore it is necessary for the Congress, through its executive, to have direct control over the elections and the programme placed before the country, as well as the activity in the legislatures. Such control will inevitably be exercised through committees and boards appointed for the purpose, but the continued existence of semi-autonomous parliamentary boards seems to be undesirable. Provision should also be made for a periodical review of all such activities, so that Congressmen in general and the country should keep in touch with them and should influence them.

The provincial legislatures may come, but few persons, I imagine, are confident about the coming of the federal part of this unholy structure. So far as we are concerned, we shall fight against it to our utmost strength, and the primary object of our creating deadlocks in the provinces and making the new Act difficult of functioning, is to kill the Federation. With the Federation dead, the provincial end of the Act will also go and leave the slate clean for the people of India to write on. That writing, whatever it be, can never admit the right of the Indian States to continue as feudal and autocratic monarchies. They have long survived their day, propped up by an

alien Power, and have become the strangest anomalies in a changing world. The future has no place for autocracy or feudalism; a free India cannot tolerate the subjection of many of her children and their deprivation of human rights, nor can it ever agree to a dissection of its body and a cutting up of its limbs. If we stand for any human, political, social, or economic rights for ourselves, we stand for those identical rights for the people of the States.

I have referred to the terrible suppression of civil liberties by the British Government in India. But in the States matters are even worse, and though we know that the real power behind those States is that of British imperialism, this tragic suppression of our brothers by their own countrymen is of painful significance. Indian Rulers and their ministers have spoken and acted increasingly in the approved Fascist manner, and their record has been one of aggressive opposition to our national demands. States which are considered advanced ban the Congress organization and offer insult to our national flag, and decree new laws to suppress the Press. What shall we say of the more backward and primitive States?

There is one more matter concerning the Constitution Act which has given rise to much controversy. This is the communal decision.<sup>1</sup> Many people have condemned it strongly and, I think, rightly; few have a good word for it. My own viewpoint is, however, somewhat different from that of others. I am not concerned so much with what it gives to this group or that, but more so with the basic idea behind it. It seems to divide India into numerous separate compartments, chiefly on a religious basis, and thus makes the development of democracy and economic policy very difficult. Indeed the communal decision and democracy can never go together. We have to admit that, under present circumstances, and so long as our policies are dominated by middle-class elements, we cannot do away with communalism altogether. But to make a necessary exception in favour of our Muslim or Sikh friends is one thing, to spread this evil principle to numerous other groups and thus to divide up the electoral machinery and the legislature into many compartments, is a far more dangerous proposition. If we wish to function democratically the proposed communal arrangement will have to go, and I have no doubt that it will go. But it will not go by the methods adopted by the aggressive opponents of the decision. These methods result inevitably in perpetuating the decision, for they help in continuing a situation which prevents any reconsideration.

<sup>1</sup> Separate electorates were provided for all minority communities, as well as for the Muslims in Bengal and the Punjab, where they constituted a majority of the population.

I have not been enamoured of the past Congress policy in regard to the communal question and its attempts to make pacts and compromises. Yet essentially I think it was based on a sound instinct. First of all the Congress always put independence first and other questions, including the communal one, second, and refused to allow any of those other questions to take pride of place. Secondly, it argued that the communal problem had arisen from a certain set of circumstances which enabled the third party to exploit the other two. In order to solve it, one had either to get rid of the third party (and that means independence), or get rid of that set of circumstances, which meant a friendly approach by the parties concerned and an attempt to soften the prejudice and fear that filled them. Thirdly, that the majority community must show generosity in the matter to allay the fear and suspicion that minorities, even though unreasonably, might have.

That analysis is, I think, perfectly sound. I would add that, in my opinion, a real solution of the problem will only come when economic issues, affecting all religious groups and cutting across communal boundaries, arise. Apart from the upper middle classes, who live in hopes of office and patronage, the masses and the lower middle classes have to face identical political and economic problems. It is odd and significant that all the communal demands of any group, of which so much is heard, have nothing whatever to do with these problems of the masses and the lower middle classes.

It is also significant that the principal communal leaders, Hindu or Moslem or others, are political reactionaries, quite apart from the communal question. It is sad to think how they have sided with British imperialism in vital matters, how they have given their approval to the suppression of civil liberty, how during these years of agony they have sought to gain narrow profit for their group at the expense of the larger cause of freedom. With them there can be no co-operation, for that would mean co-operation with reaction. But I am sure that with the larger masses and the middle classes, who may have temporarily been led away by the specious claims of their communal leaders, there must be the fullest co-operation, and out of that co-operation will come a fairer solution of this problem.

I am afraid I cannot get excited over this communal issue, important as it is temporarily. It is after all a side issue, and it can have no real importance in the larger scheme of things. Those who think of it as the major issue, think in terms of British imperialism continuing permanently in this country. Without that basis of thought, they

would not attach so much importance to one of its inevitable offshoots. I have no such fear, and so my vision of a future India contains neither imperialism nor communalism.

Yet the present difficulty remains and has to be faced. Especially our sympathy must go to the people of Bengal<sup>1</sup> who have suffered most from these communal decisions, as well as from the heavy hand of the Government. Whenever opportunity offers to improve their situation in a friendly way, we must seize it. But always the background of our action must be the national struggle for independence and the social freedom of the masses.

I have referred previously to the growing divorce between our organization and the masses. Individually many of us still have influence with the masses and our word carries weight with them, and who can measure the love and reverence of India's millions for our leader, Gandhiji? And yet organizationally we have lost that intimate touch that we had. The social reform activities of the khadi and village industries and Harijan organizations keep large numbers of our comrades in touch with the masses and those contacts bear fruit. But they are essentially non-political and so, politically, we have largely lost touch. There are many reasons for this and some are beyond our control. Our present Congress constitution is, I feel, not helpful in developing these contacts or in encouraging enough the democratic spirit in its primary committees. These committees are practically rolls of voters who meet only to elect delegates or representatives, and take no part in discussion or the formation of policy.

It is interesting to read in that monumental and impressive record, the Webbs' book on Russia,<sup>2</sup> how the whole Soviet structure is based on a wide and living democratic foundation. Russia is not supposed to be a democratic country after the Western pattern, and yet we find the essentials of democracy present in far greater degree amongst the masses there than anywhere else. The six hundred thousand towns and villages there have a vast democratic organization, each with its own soviet, constantly discussing, debating, criticizing, helping in the formulation of policy, electing representatives to higher committees. This organization as citizens covers the entire population over eighteen years of age. There is yet another vast organization of the people as producers, and a third, equally vast, as

<sup>1</sup> In 1935 approximately 55 per cent of the population of Bengal were Muslims, and practically all the rest Hindus. Today most of the Muslims live in that part of Bengal which comprises East Pakistan.

<sup>2</sup> *Soviet Communism: A New Civilization?* (1935), by Sidney and Beatrice Webb.

consumers. And thus scores of millions of men and women are constantly taking part in the discussion of public affairs, and actually in the administration of the country. There has been no such practical application of the democratic process in history.

All this is, of course, utterly beyond us, for it requires a change in the political and economic structure and much else before we can experiment that way. But we can profit by that example still, and try in our own limited way to develop democracy in the lowest rungs of the Congress ladder and make the primary committee a living organization.

An additional method for us to increase our contacts with the masses is to organize them as producers and then affiliate such organizations to the Congress or have full co-operation between the two. Organizations of producers, such as trade unions and peasant unions, as well as other anti-imperialist organizations could also be brought within this sphere of mutual co-operation for the good of the masses and for the struggle for national freedom. Thus Congress could have an individual as well as a corporate membership, and retaining its individual character, could influence, and be influenced by, other mass elements.

These are big changes that I have hinted at, and I am by no means sure how they can be brought about, or whether it is possible to go far in this direction in the near future. Still we must move to some extent, at least, if we are to have our roots in the soil of India and draw life and strength from its millions.

The Congress is an all-inclusive body and represents many interests, but essentially it is a political organization with various subsidiary and allied organizations, like the Spinners' Association and the Village Industries Association. These allied organizations work in the economic field, but they do not seek directly to remove the burdens of the peasantry under the present system of land tenure. Nor can the Congress, situated as it is, wholly function as a peasant organization, although in many provinces it has espoused the cause of the peasantry and brought them much relief. It seems to me necessary that the Congress should encourage the formation of peasant unions as well as workers' unions, and co-operate with such as already exist, so that the day-to-day struggle of the masses might be carried on on the basis of their economic demands and other grievances. This identification of the Congress with the economic struggle of the masses will bring us nearer to them and nearer to freedom than anything else. I would welcome also the organization of other special interests, like those of the women, in the general framework of our national struggle for freedom. The Congress

would be in a position to co-ordinate all these vital activities and thus to base itself on the widest possible mass foundation.

There has been some talk of a militant programme and militant action. I do not know what exactly is meant, but if direct action on a national scale or civil disobedience are meant, then I would say that I see no near prospect of them. Let us not indulge in tall talk before we are ready for big action. Our business today is to put our house in order, to sweep away the defeatist mentality of some people, and to build up our organization with its mass affiliations, as well as to work amongst the masses. The time may come, and that sooner perhaps than we expect, when we might be put to the test. Let us get ready for that test. Civil disobedience and the like cannot be switched on and off when we feel like doing so. It depends on many things, some of which are beyond our control, but in these days of revolutionary change and constantly recurring crises in the world, events often move faster than we do. We shall not lack for opportunities.

The major problem of India today is that of the land—of rural poverty and unemployment and a thoroughly out-of-date land system. A curious combination of circumstances has held back India during the past few generations, and the political and economic garments it wears no longer fit it and are torn and tattered. In some ways our agrarian conditions are not unlike those of France prior to the great revolution. They cannot continue so for long. At the same time we have become part of international capitalism and we suffer the pains and crises which afflict this decaying system. As a result of these elemental urges and conflicts of world forces what will emerge in India none can say. But we can say with confidence that the present order has reached the evening of its day, and it is up to us to try to mould the future as we would like it to be.

The world is filled with rumours and alarms of war. In Abyssinia bloody and cruel war has already gone on for many months,<sup>1</sup> and we have watched anew how hungry and predatory imperialism behaves in its mad search for colonial domains. We have watched also with admiration the brave fight of the Ethiopians for their freedom against heavy odds. You will permit me, I feel sure, to greet them on your behalf and express our deep sympathy for them. Their struggle is something more than a local struggle. It is one of the first effective checks by an African people on an advancing imperialism, and already it has had far-reaching consequences.

In the Far East, also, war hovers on the horizon, and we see an Eastern imperialism advancing methodically and pitilessly over

<sup>1</sup> Italy began her attack on Abyssinia in October 1935.

ancient China and dreaming of world empire.<sup>1</sup> Imperialism shows its claws wherever it may be, in the West or in the East.

In Europe an aggressive Fascism or Nazism steps continuously on the brink of war and vast armed camps arise in preparation for what seems to be the inevitable end of all this. Nations join hands to fight other nations, and progressive forces in each country ally themselves to fight the Fascist menace.

Where do we come in in this awful game? What part shall we play in this approaching tragedy? It is difficult to say. But we must not permit ourselves to be passive tools exploited for imperialist ends. It must be our right to say whether we join a war or not, and without that consent there should be no co-operation from us. When the time comes we may have little say in the matter, and so it becomes necessary for the Congress to declare clearly now its opposition to India's participation in any imperialist war, and every war that will be waged by imperialist Powers will be an imperialist war, whatever the excuses put forward might be. Therefore we must keep out of it and not allow Indian lives and Indian money to be sacrificed.

To the progressive forces of the world, to those who stand for human freedom and the breaking of political and social bonds, we offer our full co-operation in their struggle against imperialism and Fascist reaction, for we realize that our struggle is a common one. Our grievance is not against any people or any country as such, and we know that even in imperialist England, which throttles us, there are many who do not love imperialism and who stand for freedom.

During this period of difficulty and storm and stress, inevitably our minds and hearts turn to our great leader who has guided us and inspired us by his dynamic personality these many years. Physical ill-health prevents him now from taking his full share in public activities. Our good wishes go out to him for his rapid and complete recovery, and with those wishes is the selfish desire to have him back again amongst us. We have differed from him in the past and we shall differ from him in the future about many things, and it is right that each one of us should act up to his convictions. But the bonds that hold us together are stronger and more vital than our differences, and the pledges we took together still ring in our ears. How many of us have that passionate desire for Indian independence and the raising of our poverty-stricken masses which consumes him? Many things he taught us long years ago it seems now—fearlessness and discipline, and the will to sacrifice ourselves for the larger cause. That lesson may have grown dim but we have not forgotten it, nor

<sup>1</sup> After seizing Manchuria in 1931, Japan began her attack on the rest of China in 1937.

can we ever forget him who has made us what we are and raised India again from the depths. The pledge of independence that we took together still remains to be redeemed, and we await again for him to guide us with his wise counsel.

But no leader, however great he be, can shoulder the burden single-handed; we must all share it to the best of our ability and not seek helplessly to rely on others to perform miracles. Leaders come and go; many of our best-loved captains and comrades have left us all too soon, but India goes on and so does India's struggle for freedom. It may be that many of us must suffer still and die so that India may live and be free. The promised land may yet be far from us, and we may have to march wearily through the deserts, but who will take away from us that deathless hope which has survived the scaffold and immeasurable suffering and sorrow; who will dare to crush the spirit of India which has found rebirth again and again after so many crucifixions?

## CHAPTER IV

*The Quetta Earthquake<sup>1</sup>*


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IT is curious how sometimes a relatively minor event impresses one more than a major happening. Trivial words or gestures are apt to reveal an individual far more than his studied poses and utterances. So also with nations and peoples and governments. I suppose most people will agree that one of the outstanding events of recent times in India was the shooting down of large numbers of unarmed men and women by General Dyer and his soldiery in the Jallianwala Bagh,<sup>2</sup> and the consequences of this deed were far-reaching. Amritsar, indeed, has become something more than a city of the Punjab, or even the holy place of Sikhism. It typifies the world over a particularly brutal method of dealing with subject peoples. And yet, ghastly as all this was, I have never had much difficulty in understanding the mentality of a Dyer, and because of that feeling

<sup>1</sup> Written in prison, August 1935.

<sup>2</sup> In 1919.

of at least partial understanding, my resentment against him personally has probably been far less than that of most other Indians. It is true that he made his case unpardonable and wholly inexcusable by his arrogance and vulgar bragging before the Hunter Committee of Inquiry. But even that had a psychological explanation and, granting the vulgarity and the jingoism, the rest more or less followed.

What affected me far more, and I imagine there were many others who felt this way, was the reaction in England to Dyer's deed and his evidence. Officially he was mildly reprimanded, and there were no doubt many individuals who condemned him and some newspapers that criticized him strongly. But the real reaction of the British ruling classes was never in doubt. It was clear as daylight, and the *Morning Post* and the House of Lords and the subscription raised for General Dyer shouted it out to the world. This cold-blooded approval of that deed shocked me greatly. It seemed absolutely immoral, indecent; to use public school language, it was the height of bad form. I realized then, more vividly than I had ever done before, how brutal and immoral imperialism was and how it had eaten into the souls of the British upper classes.

My mind went back to this revealing instance when I read about the refusal of the Government of India to allow Gandhiji and Rajendra Prasad,<sup>1</sup> the President of the Congress for the year, to visit Quetta after the great earthquake. That refusal, a trivial enough affair, was yet most revealing of the mentality of Government. Inevitably, one thought of the contrast when, in connection with another great earthquake, Gandhiji had offered, on behalf of the Committee, of which Rajendra Babu was the honoured head, whole-hearted and 'respectful' co-operation to the Government. That co-operation was worth having, as Rajendra Prasad's Committee had almost as big a fund at its disposal as the Government, with all its resources in India and England, had managed to collect; even more, it was valuable because of the fine village organization of workers behind Rajendra Babu and his colleagues. It is also worth remembering that this co-operation was offered even though in theory civil disobedience of a kind continued and many prominent Congressmen were in prison.

That contrast was marked. But even apart from that the obvious course for any sensible Government would have been to invite the co-operation of Rajendra Prasad after the fine work he did in the Behar earthquake and the great experience he gained thereby. There must be very few persons in India who can rival him in

<sup>1</sup> Elected first President of India in 1950, and re-elected in 1957.

knowledge of earthquake relief work. In all probability he knows far more of the subject than all the members of the Governor-General's Executive Council and their various secretaries taken together.

Another equally obvious thing to do, in order to gain public support and co-operation, was to take a number of public men and newspaper men into the Government's confidence, give them full facilities to visit the earthquake area, and discuss the situation frankly with them. This would not have tied the hands of Government in any way, and it is absurd to say that some additional arrivals in the affected area would have upset the food situation or the sanitary measures that were being taken. Such newcomers would have made their own food arrangements, and if they risked catching an infectious disease that was their look out. It was not a question of crowds of outsiders rolling in and interfering with all arrangements.

But our benign Government has an astonishing knack of doing the wrong thing, and even on the rare occasions when it does the right thing it does it in a wrong way. And then it is painfully surprised when it finds that the purity of its motives is suspected and cheering crowds do not welcome its efforts with enthusiasm.

There was no room for Gandhiji or Rajendra Babu or other popular leaders and well-known relief workers in Quetta, but Boy Scouts could be sent without danger of their catching disease or lessening the stock of food. If Gandhiji had gone there might have been a shortage of goat's milk and dates.

Quetta became one of the battle-fronts, enveloped as it were in the fog of war, a no-man's land which was cut off from the rest of the country. The official megaphone boomed out its version of the news to us and told us of the wonders that were being performed by the official agency alone and unaided by others.

I am the blessed Glendoveer,  
'Tis mine to speak and yours to hear.

True there were also the Simla correspondents of certain favoured newspapers, those wise and clever mortals who are not like unto other men, and who can even glimpse, as through a glass darkly, the mysterious workings of the godlike mind of the Government of India.

It was not unnatural or unexpected that these arrangements should meet with the disapproval of less favoured newspaper men and others. Nor was it at all surprising that they should, under the circumstances, give credence and publicity to vague rumours, many of them exaggerated or even unfounded. That was very wrong, of

course, but human nature is weak, and it is not possible for all of us to live up to the high and noble standards set in Simla or New Delhi. Exclude a newspaper man and you make him suspicious and capable of believing almost anything. The Soviet Government once prevented all newspaper men from going to the Caucasus. The journalists scented trouble, something that the Soviet wanted to hide. It was a huge famine said one; others inclined to the view that a nationalist rebellion had broken out in Georgia and parts of the Ukraine. The argument continued, and it is by no means clear what took place then in those forbidden regions. Most people very rightly imagine that something not creditable to the Soviet Government must have occurred, else why this hush-hush policy? And the Soviet can hardly complain if rumours and exaggerated accounts are believed.

So also a number of Indian newspapers, excited and displeased at the official attitude about Quetta, gave publicity to such scraps of news as rumour brought them. And then the Press Act and various emergency measures descended heavily on these hapless papers with their forfeits and securities. A large sum of money went from the newspapers to the provincial governments. The majesty of the Government had been vindicated. Truth had prevailed, as it was bound to, in the end, and the serpent of falsehood had been crushed by the swift action of various magistrates and governors and the like.

I have absolutely no idea what these items of news or comments were to which Government objected. It really does not much matter what they were, and I am prepared to assume that they were thoroughly objectionable. What seems to me much more important is the extraordinary attitude of the Government throughout this Quetta business. They took one false step after another—perhaps each subsequent step was made inevitable by the previous one—and made a horrid mess of a simple business. Who could have thought that even an earthquake could be bungled in this manner? And it is this bungling that reveals as in a flash that curious compound of conceit, ideas of prestige, intolerance, a certain cleverness, distrust, fear, and stupidity which go to make up the mind of the Government of India.

I do not mean that the actual relief work in Quetta was bungled. I have no knowledge of that, but I am inclined to think that an official agency, even when efficient, lacks the human touch and is often wasteful. I imagine that the addition of non-officials to the workers, especially in the villages round about Quetta city, would have gone a long way to supply this human touch. Personally I am not a believer even in the efficiency of official processes. But as the

relief work was in charge of the military it was probably far more efficient than the civil side of Government would have been.

It was indeed fortunate for Quetta that a large force of military was stationed there, and they could immediately start relief operations. Disciplined soldiers are the best workers in such an emergency, especially in the early days. In any event the British and Indian soldiery would have worked hard and earnestly at the task; the fact that their own comrades had perished in the catastrophe must have added to their zeal. Unfortunately, but very naturally, the army is not popular with the people. It is looked upon as something foreign, meant and used from time to time to keep them down. The Indian soldiers are definitely mercenary, the British troops foreigners wholly ignorant of the land they are serving in, and both of them are looked upon with fear and dislike by the people. Especially is the Tommy the object of this distrust. There are no points of contact between him and the people, and there are numerous barriers separating them. Even our B.A.s and M.A.s, on the rare occasions when they meet Tommies, find it difficult to get over the language difficulty. Their training in Shakespeare and Milton has not qualified them to understand the cockney speech, or the broad Lancashire and Yorkshire dialect, or English as she is spoken across the Tweed.

This gulf and the fear and distrust of the military are unfortunate. The Indian soldier is very much the peasant we know with a thin veneer of soldiering over him; the British Tommy is a very simple and likeable creature, rather shy, and afraid of himself in strange surroundings, but always willing to expand and grow friendly if approached in the right way. The two, with the discipline and organization behind them, were ideal workers in the earthquake area, and it was well that they were utilized immediately. But however good they might have been, they could not supply all the human needs of the people, nor could they easily get rid of the distrust which had long been associated with them.

It seems to me that it was also very proper on the part of Government to regulate the entry of people into the earthquake area. Large numbers of odd people, bent on doing relief work after their own fashion, might easily have created confusion and hindered work rather than helped it. But to regulate entry is one thing, to close and seal the area as if it was a theatre of war is quite another. I do not know if any military considerations prompted this secretive policy, for the frontier<sup>1</sup> is not far from Quetta. But no considerations could possibly justify the deliberate and offensive exclusion of noted public men who were offering their services in a spirit of co-opera-

<sup>1</sup> Afghanistan.

tion. It is quite inconceivable that any such attitude could have been taken up in any other country that is supposed to be civilized. Only a Government arrogantly irresponsible to popular feeling could have acted in this way.

Why did the Government of India act in this manner, I wondered, for whatever its actions might be, it has to bow down to some extent to the spirit of the times, and to talk of co-operation and the like. The only answer I could find was that the Government had Gandhi and the Congress on the brain. It is not for me to object to this obsession of theirs; I think they have some justification for it. But it seems to lead them into curious corners. A psychologist would probably give a satisfactory explanation of this by reference to some complex. Gandhi and the Congress are both nuisances; therefore let us ignore them, sit on them. If our superiority is not sufficiently recognized, let us proclaim it ourselves and compel people to listen to us; let us collect chits emphasizing this superiority and praising our good works. If we are not tall enough, let us stand on tip-toe; people will surely be impressed.

Perhaps it is some such unconscious functioning of the mind that forms the background of much that Government does. The old desire to keep up prestige means in the end some kind of attempt to stand on one's toes, in the vain hope of adding to one's size. But this is hardly a dignified procedure, and seldom deceives. Often it has the opposite effect.

So it was in this Quetta business. The attempt of Government to snub Gandhi and the Congress resulted in the Government being shown up for what it was, through its hurried attempts to justify itself, and its unseemly anger at its critics. The Congress and Gandhi did rather well. There was dignity in their attitude; there was no shouting, no outward anger, no official remonstrance even.

Our high officers of Government move about with pomp and circumstance, their surroundings impress us, their gilded liveries of office dazzle us, they address us from time to time in stately, if somewhat trite, phrases pointing out the error of our ways. They cultivate the calm and dignified demeanour of the great.

They think that dignity of soul may come,  
Perchance, with dignity of body.

Perhaps it helps a little. But even dignity of body is not very evident when one is standing on one's toes.

## CHAPTER V

*Nehru's Statement at his Trial<sup>1</sup>*

I HAVE been told that the charge against me is based on the reports of three speeches I delivered in the Gorakhpur district early in October last. Copies of these reports, and in one case their translation into English, have been given to me. I have read these, and I cannot congratulate the persons who were responsible for the reporting. These reports, though presumably taken down in short-hand, are scrappy and incomplete, confusing, and often making little sense.

I am a lover of words and phrases and try to use them appropriately. Whatever my opinions might be, the words I use are meant to express them intelligibly and in ordered sequence. A reader of these reports will find little intelligence or sequence in them, and is likely to obtain an entirely distorted impression of what I actually said.

I make no complaint of this reporting, and I do not suggest that deliberate distortions have been made. But I do want to make it clear that what I said was in many respects entirely different from what the jumble of words in the reports would lead me to imagine. If this is so in the reporting of my speeches, when care is taken and the more qualified men are employed, I cease to wonder what happens when the speeches of others are reported by totally unqualified persons and these are made the basis of charges in courts of law.

It is not my intention to give details of the many errors and mistakes in these reports. That would mean rewriting them completely. That would waste your time, sir, and mine and would serve little purpose. I am not here to defend myself, and perhaps what I say in this statement will make your task easier. I do not yet know the exact nature of the charge against me. I gather that it has something to do with the Defence of India Rules and that it relates

<sup>1</sup> In October 1940, Congress launched a civil disobedience campaign, on an individual basis, to protest against India's participation in the war. Vinoba Bhave was the first to be arrested, and Nehru a few days afterwards. Nehru's Trial was held at Gorakhpur Prison, November 3, 1940.



to my references to war and to the attempts being made to compel the people of India to take part in the war effort. If that is so, I shall gladly admit the charge. It is not necessary to go to garbled reports to find out what I or other Congressmen say in regard to India and the war. The Congress resolutions and statements, carefully and precisely worded, are there for all the world to know. By those resolutions and statements I stand, and I consider it my duty to take the message of the Congress to the people of India.

As a matter of fact, ever since the Congress came to the conclusion that, in order to give effect to the Congress policy, *satyagraha*, or civil disobedience, should be started, I have endeavoured to check myself in my utterances and to avoid what might be termed *satyagraha*. Such was the direction of our chief, Mahatma Gandhi, who desired that the *satyagraha* should be confined to particular persons of his choice.

One such person was selected, and he expressed in public utterances the Congress attitude to the war, laying some emphasis on the Congress policy of non-violence. It was my good fortune to have been selected to follow him and to give expression to the Congress viewpoint, with perhaps greater emphasis on the political aspect. It had been decided that I should do so, after giving due notice to the authorities, from November 7 onwards, in the district of Allahabad. That programme has been varied owing to my arrest and trial, and the opportunity to give frank and full expression to Congress policy in regard to the war has come to me earlier than I anticipated.

If I was chosen, or if before me Shri Vinoba Bhave was chosen for this purpose, it was not to give expression to our individual views. We were symbols who spoke the mind of India in the name of India, or, at any rate, of a vast number of people in India. As individuals we may have counted for little, but as such symbols and representatives of the Indian people we counted for a great deal. In the name of those people we asserted their right to freedom and to decide for themselves what they should do and what they would not do; we challenged the right of any other authority by whomsoever constituted to deprive them of this right and to force its will upon them. No individual or groups of individuals, not deriving authority from the Indian people and not responsible to them in any way, should impose their will upon them and thrust the hundreds of millions of India, without any reference to them or their representatives, into a mighty war which was none of their seeking. It was amazing and full of significance that this should be done in the name of freedom and self-determination and democracy, for which, it was alleged, the war was being waged.

We were slow in coming to our final conclusions; we hesitated and parleyed; we sought a way out honourable to all the parties concerned. We failed, and the inevitable conclusion was forced upon us that, so far as the British Government or their representatives were concerned, we were still looked upon as chattel to do their will and to continue to be exploited in their imperialist structure. That was a position which we could never tolerate, whatever the consequences.

There are very few persons in India, I suppose—whether they are Indians or Englishmen, who have for years past so consistently raised their voices against Fascism and Nazism as I have done. My whole nature rebelled against them, and on many an occasion I vehemently criticized the pro-Fascist and appeasement policy of the British Government. Ever since the invasion of Manchuria, and subsequently in Abyssinia, Central Europe, Spain, and China, I saw with pain and anguish how country after country was betrayed in the name of this appeasement and how the lamps of liberty were being put out. I realized that imperialism could only function in this way; it had to appease its rival imperialism, or else its own ideological foundations were weakened. It had to choose between this and liquidating itself in favour of democratic freedom. There was no middle way.

So long as appeasement applied to Manchuria, Abyssinia, Czechoslovakia, Spain, and Albania, to 'far-away countries about which few people had ever heard', as the then Prime Minister of England put it, it did not matter much and was faithfully pursued. But when it came nearer home and threatened the British Empire itself, the clash came and war began.

Again there were two alternatives before the British Government and each Government engaged in the war—to continue to function in the old imperialist way or to end this in their own domains and become the leaders of the urge for freedom and revolutionary change the world over. They chose the former, though they still talked in terms of freedom, self-determination, and democracy. But their conception of freedom was, even in words, limited to Europe, and evidently meant freedom to carry on with their Empire in the old way. Not even peril and disaster have weakened their intention to hold on to their Empire and enforce their will upon subject peoples.

In India we have had over a year of war government. The people's elected Legislatures have been suspended and ignored, and a greater and more widespread autocracy prevails here than anywhere else in the world. Recent measures have suppressed completely such limited freedom as the Press possessed to give facts and opinions. If this is the prelude to the freedom that is promised us, or to the 'New

Order' about which so much is said, then we can well imagine what the later stages will be when England emerges as a full-blooded Fascist State.

I am convinced that the large majority of people in England are weary of Empire and hunger for a real new order. But we have to deal, not with them, but with their Government, and we have no doubt in our minds as to what that Government aims at. With that we have nothing in common, and we shall resist to the uttermost. We have therefore decided to be no party to this imposed war and to declare this to the world.

This war has led already to widespread destruction and will lead to even greater horror and misery. With those who suffer we sympathize deeply and in all sincerity. But unless the war has a revolutionary aim of ending the present order and substituting something based on freedom and co-operation, it will lead to a continuation of wars and violence and utmost destruction.

That is why we must dissociate ourselves from this war and advise our people to do likewise and not help in any way with money or men. This is our bounden duty. But even apart from this, the treatment accorded the Indian people during the past year by the British authorities, the latter's attempt to encourage every disruptive and reactionary tendency, their forcible realizations of money for the war from even the poor of India, and their repeated affronts to Indian nationalism, are such that we can never forget or ignore.

No self-respecting people can tolerate such behaviour, and the people of India have no intention of tolerating it.

I stand before you, sir, as an individual being tried for certain offences against the State. You are a symbol of that State. But I am something more than an individual also; I, too, am a symbol at the present moment, a symbol of Indian nationalism, resolved to break away from the British Empire and achieve the independence of India. It is not me that you are seeking to judge and condemn, but rather the hundreds of millions of the people of India, and that is a large task even for a proud Empire. Perhaps it may be that, though I am standing before you on my trial, it is the British Empire itself that is on its trial before the bar of the world. There are more powerful forces at work in the world today than courts of law; there are elemental urges for freedom and food and security which are moving vast masses of people, and history is being moulded by them. The future recorder of this history might well say that in the hour of supreme trial the Government of Britain and the people of Britain failed because they could not adapt themselves to a changing world. He may muse over the fate of empires which have always fallen be-

cause of this weakness and call it destiny. Certain causes inevitably produce certain results. We know the causes; the results are inexorably in their train.

It is a small matter to me what happens to me in this trial subsequently. Individuals count for little; they come and go, as I shall go when my time is up. Seven times I have been tried and convicted by British authority in India, and many years of my life lie buried within prison walls. An eighth time or a ninth, and a few more years, make little difference.

But it is no small matter what happens to India and her millions of sons and daughters. That is the issue before me, and that ultimately is the issue before you, sir. If the British Government imagines it can continue to exploit them and play about with them against their will, as it has done for so long in the past, then it is grievously mistaken. It has misjudged their present temper and read history in vain.

I should like to add that I am happy to be tried in Gorakhpur. The peasantry of Gorakhpur are the poorest and the most long-suffering in my Province. I am glad that it was my visit to the Gorakhpur district and my attempt to serve its people that has led to this trial.

I thank you, sir, for your courtesy.

## CHAPTER VI

### *The Last Letter to Indira<sup>1</sup>*

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WE have finished, my dear; the long story has ended. I need write no more, but the desire to end off with a kind of flourish induces me to write another letter—the Last Letter!

It was time I finished, for the end of my two-year term draws near. In three and thirty days from today I should be discharged,

<sup>1</sup> For over two years, with a short break when he was out of prison, Nehru continued to write letters to his daughter from prison, giving her an outline of world history. This is the last of the series, written in August 1933, and later published in *Glimpses of World History*.

if indeed I am not released sooner, as the gaoler sometimes threatens to do. The full two years are not over yet, but I have received three and a half months' remission of my sentence, as all well-behaved<sup>1</sup> prisoners do. For I am supposed to be a well-behaved prisoner, a reputation which I have certainly done nothing to deserve. So ends my sixth sentence, and I shall go out again into the wide world, but to what purpose? *A quoi bon?*—when most of my friends and comrades lie in gaol and the whole country seems a vast prison.

What a mountain of letters I have written! And what a lot of good *swadeshi*<sup>1</sup> ink I have spread out on *swadeshi* paper. Was it worth while, I wonder? Will all this paper and ink convey any message to you that will interest you? You will say 'Yes', of course, for you will feel that any other answer might hurt me, and you are too partial to me to take such a risk. But whether you care for them or not, you cannot grudge me the joy of having written them, day after day, during these two long years. It was winter when I came. Winter gave place to our brief spring, slain all too soon by the summer heat; and then when the ground was parched and dry and men and beasts panted for breath, came the monsoon with its bountiful supply of fresh and cool rain water. Autumn followed, and the sky was wonderfully clear and blue, and the afternoons were pleasant. The year's cycle was over, and again it began: winter and spring and summer and the rainy season. I have sat here, writing to you and thinking of you, and watched the seasons go by, and listened to the pit-a-pat of the rain on my barrack roof—

O doux bruit de la pluie,  
Par terre et sur les toits!  
Pour un coeur qui s'ennuie,  
Oh! le chant de la pluie!<sup>2</sup>

Benjamin Disraeli, the great English statesman of the nineteenth century, has written that: 'Other men condemned to exile and captivity, if they survive, despair; the man of letters may reckon those days as the sweetest of his life'. He was writing about Hugo Grotius, a famous Dutch jurist and philosopher of the seventeenth century, who was condemned to imprisonment for life, but managed to

<sup>1</sup> Home-made, that is, Indian made.

<sup>2</sup> O soft sound of rain  
On earth and on the roofs  
For a heart that is pining  
Oh! the song of the rain.

escape after two years. He spent these two years in prison in philosophic and literary work. There have been many famous literary gaolbirds, the two best known perhaps being the Spaniard, Cervantes, who wrote *Don Quixote*, and the Englishman, John Bunyan, the author of *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

I am not a man of letters and I am not prepared to say that the many years I have spent in gaol have been the sweetest in my life, but I must say that reading and writing have helped me wonderfully to get through them. I am not a literary man, and I am not a historian; what indeed am I? I find it difficult to answer that question. I have been a dabbler in many things; I began with science at college and then took to the law, and, after developing various other interests in life, finally adopted the popular and widely practised profession of gaol-going in India!

You must not take what I have written in these letters as the final authority on any subject. A politician wants to have a say on every subject, and he always pretends to know much more than he actually does. He has to be watched carefully! These letters of mine are but superficial sketches joined together by a thin thread. I have rambled on, skipping centuries and many important happenings, and then pitching my tent for quite a long time on some event which interested me. As you will notice, my likes and dislikes are pretty obvious, and so also sometimes are my moods in gaol. I do not want you to take all this for granted; there may indeed be many errors in my accounts. A prison, with no libraries or reference books at hand, is not the most suitable place to write on historical subjects. I have had to rely very largely on the many note-books which I have accumulated since I began my visits to gaol twelve years ago. Many books have also come to me here; they have come and gone, for I could not collect a library here. I have shamelessly taken from these books facts and ideas; there is nothing original in what I have written. Perhaps occasionally you may find my letters difficult to follow; skip those parts, do not mind them. The grown-up in me got the better of me sometimes and I wrote as I should not have done.

I have given you the barest outline; this is not history; they are just fleeting glimpses of our long past. If history interests you, if you feel some of the fascination of history, you will find your way to many books which will help you to unravel the threads of past ages. But reading books alone will not help. If you would know the past you must look upon it with sympathy and with understanding. To understand a person who lived long ago, you will have to understand his environment, the conditions under which he lived, the ideas that filled his mind. It is absurd for us to judge of past people

as if they lived now and thought as we do. There is no one to defend slavery today, and yet the great Plato held that slavery was essential. Within recent times scores of thousands of lives were given in an effort to retain slavery in the United States. We cannot judge the past from the standards of the present. Everyone will willingly admit this. But everyone will not admit the equally absurd habit of judging the present by the standards of the past. The various religions have especially helped in petrifying old beliefs and faiths and customs, which may have had some use in the age and country of their birth, but which are singularly unsuitable in our present age.

If, then, you look upon past history with the eye of sympathy, the dry bones will fill up with flesh and blood, and you will see a mighty procession of living men and women and children in every age and every clime, different from us and yet very like us, with much the same human virtues and human failings. History is not a magic show, but there is plenty of magic in it for those who have eyes to see.

Innumerable pictures from the gallery of history crowd our minds. Egypt—Babylon—Nineveh—the old Indian civilizations—the coming of the Aryans to India and their spreading out over Europe and Asia—the wonderful record of Chinese culture—Knossos and Greece—Imperial Rome and Byzantium—the triumphant march of the Arabs across two continents—the renascence of Indian culture and its decay—the little known Maya and Aztec civilizations of America—the vast conquests of the Mongols—the Middle Ages in Europe with their wonderful Gothic cathedrals—the coming of Islam to India and the Mughal Empire—the Renaissance of learning and art in Western Europe—the discovery of America and the sea routes to the East—the beginnings of Western aggression in the East—the coming of the big machine and the development of capitalism—the spread of industrialism and European domination and imperialism—and the wonders of science in the modern world.

Great Empires have risen and fallen and been forgotten by man for thousands of years, till their remains were dug up again by patient explorers from under the sands that covered them. And yet many an idea, many a fancy has survived and proved stronger and more persistent than the Empire.

Egypt's might is tumbled down  
Down a-down the deeps of thought;  
Greece is fallen and Troy town,  
Glorious Rome hath lost her crown,  
Venice' pride is nought.

But the dreams their children dreamed  
 Fleeting, unsubstantial, vain,  
 Shadowy as the shadows seemed,  
 Airy nothing, as they deemed,  
 These remain.

So sings Mary Coleridge.

The past brings us many gifts; indeed, all that we have today of culture, civilization, science, or knowledge of some aspects of the truth, is a gift of the distant or recent past to us. It is right that we acknowledge our obligation to the past. But the past does not exhaust our duty or obligation. We owe a duty to the future also and perhaps that obligation is even greater than the one we owe to the past. For the past is past and done with, we cannot change it; the future is yet to come, and perhaps we may be able to shape it a little. If the past has given us some part of the truth, the future also hides many aspects of the truth and invites us to search for it. But often the past is jealous of the future and holds us in a terrible grip, and we have to struggle with it to get free to face and advance towards the future.

History, it is said, has many lessons to teach us; and there is another saying that history never repeats itself. Both are true, for we cannot learn anything from it by slavishly trying to copy it, or by expecting it to repeat itself or remain stagnant; but we can learn something from it by prying behind it and trying to discover the forces that move it. Even so what we get is seldom a straight answer. 'History,' says Karl Marx, 'has no other way of answering old questions than by putting new ones.'

The old days were days of faith; blind, unquestioning faith. The wonderful temples and mosques and cathedrals of past centuries could never have been built but for the overpowering faith of the architects and builders and people generally. The very stones they reverently put one on top of the other, or carved in beautiful designs, tell us of this faith. The old temple spire, the mosque with its slender minarets, the Gothic cathedral—all of them pointing upward with an amazing intensity of devotion, as if offering a prayer in stone or marble to the sky above—thrill us even now, though we may be lacking in that faith of old of which they are the embodiments. But the days of that faith are gone, and gone with them is that magic touch in stone. Thousands of temples and mosques and cathedrals continue to be built, but they lack the spirit that made them live during the Middle Ages. There is little difference between them and the commercial offices which are so representative of our age.

Our age is a different one; it is an age of disillusion, of doubt and uncertainty and questioning. We can no longer accept many of the ancient beliefs and customs; we have no more faith in them, in Asia or in Europe or America. So we search for new ways, new aspects of the truth more in harmony with our environment. And we question each other and debate and quarrel and evolve any number of 'isms' and philosophies. As in the days of Socrates, we live in an age of questioning, but that questioning is not confined to a city like Athens; it is world-wide.

Sometimes the injustice, the unhappiness, the brutality of the world oppress us and darken our minds, and we see no way out. With Matthew Arnold, we feel that there is no hope in this world, and all we can do is to be true to one another.

For the world which seems  
 To lie before us, like a land of dreams,  
 So various, so beautiful, so new,  
 Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,  
 Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;  
 And we are here, as on a darkling plain  
 Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,  
 Where ignorant armies clash by night.

And yet if we take such a dismal view we have not learnt aright the lesson of life or of history. For history teaches us of growth and progress and of the possibility of an infinite advance for man. And life is rich and varied, and though it has many swamps and marshes and muddy places, it has also the great sea, and the mountains, and snow, and glaciers, and wonderful star-lit nights (especially in gaol!), and the love of family and friends, and the comradeship of workers in a common cause, and music, and books, and the Empire of ideas. So that each one of us may well say:

Lord, though I lived on earth, the child of earth,  
 Yet was I fathered by the starry sky.

It is easy to admire the beauties of the universe and to live in a world of thought and imagination. But to try to escape in this way from the unhappiness of others, caring little what happens to them, is no sign of courage or fellow-feeling. Thought, in order to justify itself, must lead to action. 'Action is the end of thought,' says our friend Romain Rolland, 'All thought which does not look towards action is an abortion and a treachery. If they we are the servants of thought we must be the servants of action.'

People avoid action often because they are afraid of the consequences, for action means risk and danger. Danger seems terrible from a distance; it is not so bad if you have a close look at it. And often it is a pleasant companion, adding to the zest and delight of life. The ordinary course of life becomes dull at times, and we take too many things for granted and have no joy in them. And yet how we appreciate these common things of life when we have lived without them for a while! Many people go up high mountains and risk life and limb for the joy of the climb and the exhilaration that comes from a difficulty surmounted, a danger overcome; and because of the danger that hovers all around them, their perceptions get keener, their joy of the life which hangs by a thread, the more intense.

All of us have our choice of living in the valleys below with their unhealthy mists and fogs, but giving a measure of bodily security; or of climbing the high mountains, with risk and danger for companions, to breathe the pure air above, and take joy in the distant views, and welcome the rising sun.

I have given you many quotations and extracts from poets and others in this letter. I shall finish up with one more. It is from the *Gitanjali*; it is a poem, or prayer, by Rabindra Nath Tagore:

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;  
 Where knowledge is free;  
 Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow  
     domestic walls;  
 Where words come out from the depth of truth;  
 Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection;  
 Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary  
     desert sand of dead habit;  
 Where the mind is led forward by thee into ever-widening thought  
     and action—  
 Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.

We have finished, carissima, and this last letter ends. The last letter! Certainly not! I shall write you many more. But this series ends, and so

*Tāmam Shud!*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A Persian expression: 'It is finished.'

## CHAPTER VII

*Mahatma Gandhi*<sup>1</sup>

MR SOUMYANDRANATH TAGORE is one of our young comrades in India for whom I have the greatest respect. Ardent, clear-headed, and devoted to the cause of the freedom of the masses, anything that he says or writes must deserve attention. But I have seen with great regret the criticism of Gandhi which he has written in a recent book. All legitimate criticism is to be welcomed, for it helps us to get at the truth, and no personality, however great, should be above this criticism. But it seems to me that Mr Tagore has done an injustice to himself and has failed to grasp many of the underlying factors of the Indian situation in his eagerness to paint Gandhi as a reactionary force in every way. It is not possible for me in these lines to consider many of Mr Tagore's statements which I think are wrong. But, as one who has differed from Gandhi in many important matters and yet co-operated with him in a large measure, I should like to express my disagreement with Mr Tagore's basic analysis of Gandhi.

It should be remembered that the nationalist movement in India, like all nationalist movements, was essentially a bourgeois movement. It represented the natural historical stage of development, and to consider it or to criticize it as a working-class movement is wrong. Gandhi represented that movement and the Indian masses in relation to that movement to a supreme degree, and he became the voice of the Indian people to that extent. He functioned inevitably within the orbit of nationalist ideology, but the dominating passion that consumed him was a desire to raise the masses. In this respect he was always ahead of the nationalist movement, and he gradually made it, within the limits of its own ideology, turn in this direction. Economic events in India and the world powerfully pushed Indian nationalism towards vital social changes, and today it hovers, somewhat undecided, on the brink of a new social ideology.

<sup>1</sup> This article, which was published in *L'Europe* early in 1936, was written in reply to attacks on Mr Gandhi which Mr Soumyandranath Tagore had recently published in France.

But the main contribution of Gandhi to India and the Indian masses has been through the powerful movements which he launched through the National Congress. Through nation-wide action he sought to mould the millions, and largely succeeded in doing so, and changing them from a demoralized, timid, and hopeless mass, bullied and crushed by every dominant interest, and incapable of resistance, into a people with self-respect and self-reliance, resisting tyranny, and capable of united action and sacrifice for a larger cause. He made them think of political and economic issues, and every village and every bazaar hummed with argument and debate on the new ideas and hopes that filled the people. That was an amazing psychological change. The time was ripe for it, of course, and circumstances and world conditions worked for this change. But a great leader is necessary to take advantage of circumstances and conditions. Gandhi was that leader, and he released many of the bonds that imprisoned and disabled our minds, and none of us who experienced it can ever forget that great feeling of release and exhilaration that came over the Indian people. Gandhi has played a revolutionary role in India of the greatest importance because he knew how to make the most of the objective conditions and could reach the heart of the masses; while groups with a more advanced ideology functioned largely in the air because they did not fit in with those conditions and could therefore not evoke any substantial response from the masses.

To call Gandhi an ally of British imperialism is the veriest nonsense which can only evoke a smile. The answer to that charge can best be given by the British Government and by British imperialists, who have all along considered him their most dangerous opponent. They have tried to suppress him and oppose him in every way, and the measure of their reaction to him and to the National Congress is the wide-flung and intensive repression that is going on in India.

It is perfectly true that Gandhi, functioning in the nationalist plane, does not think in terms of the conflict of classes, and tries to compose their differences. But the action he has indulged in and taught the people has inevitably raised mass consciousness tremendously and made social issues vital. And his insistence on the raising of the masses at the cost, wherever necessary, of vested interests has given a strong orientation to the national movement in favour of the masses.

Essentially, the Congress under Gandhi's leadership has been a joint and anti-imperialist front. Mr Tagore in his book does not believe in the desirability of such a united front. But I should be surprised if he has not changed his opinion since he wrote his book,

for, as everyone knows, the policy of the Comintern and the Communist parties in different countries has undergone a great change in recent months in favour of a united front. In France there is the Front Populaire, in England the Communist Party wants to co-operate with the Labour Party, and in the colonial countries there is the definite attempt at co-operation with nationalist movements. In India itself, so far as I know, they are in favour of a joint anti-imperialist front.

Ghandi and the Congress must be judged by the policies they pursue and the action they indulge in. But behind this, personality counts and colours those policies and activities. In the case of a very exceptional person like Gandhi the question of personality becomes especially important in order to understand and appraise him. An English journalist, with a wide experience of men prominent and otherwise in public affairs all over the world, has referred to Gandhi in a book<sup>1</sup> of his, and the passage is interesting and worth quoting. He says: 'I have never met any man more utterly honest, more transparently sincere, less given to egotism, self-conscious pride, opportunism, and ambition which are found in greater or less degree in all the other great political figures of the world.' An English journalist's opinion need not carry much weight with us, nor does the sincerity of a person excuse a wrong policy or mistaken ideas. But as it happens, that opinion is shared by millions in India, and it is very superficial criticism to dispose of such a unique and outstanding personality by cheap and well-worn phrases which are applied indiscriminately to the average politician. We in India have often differed from Gandhi, we differ from him still in many ways, and sometimes we may follow different paths, but it has been the greatest privilege of our lives to work with him and under him for a great cause. To us he has represented the spirit and honour of India, the yearning of her sorrowing millions to be rid of their innumerable burdens, and an insult to him by the British Government or others has been an insult to India and her people.

<sup>1</sup> George Slocombe in *The Tumult and the Shouting*.

## CHAPTER VIII

*A Visit to England*

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I WAS twelve days in London—twelve full days spent in meeting many people and groups, and much talk and argument and the answering of questions. I went with no particular object or intention, I sought nothing in particular except to meet some people I wanted to see and to renew my acquaintance with various currents of English thought. It was almost an educational visit for me, and though circumstances made me talk a great deal, I went to receive impressions more than to give them. Gradually I found myself drawn into all manner of environments and meeting people whom I had least expected to meet. I was a little surprised and pleased, for there was welcome and cordiality everywhere, even from those who disagreed with me utterly. My visit fitted in with my election to the presidentship of the Indian National Congress, and perhaps it was this that gave me an importance I would not have otherwise deserved. Perhaps to many people I became a symbol for a while of the suffering that my countrymen and countrywomen had undergone in recent years, and there was a vague desire to offer something in the nature of reparation. I was a poor enough symbol, for large numbers of others have gone through far greater ordeals; but I was present in the flesh and others were far away, and I sensed among many I met in England a kind of vague pricking of conscience at the doings of British authority in India.

It was very pleasant to meet with all this friendliness and interest in India and her problems, and yet it seemed to me that the interest was largely confined to special groups and individuals, and behind them lay the vast mass of intelligent as well as unintelligent British opinion which was tired and bored over the Indian question. They had had enough of it, other and much more interesting and important events were happening in the world and they wanted to forget about India, just as, psychologists tell us, our subconscious self makes us forget many an unpleasant occurrence which we would rather not remember. Some took comfort in the thought that the India Act being passed, India was out of the picture for many years

to come. Others, not so sanguine, yet did not know what they could do; it was a damnable intricate and confusing problem, and it was best to ignore it.

These reactions were perhaps natural; they were not difficult to understand. It was not the intricacy of the problem that baffled, for it was simple enough in its essence, but the fact that any effective solution inevitably came up against the whole structure of British political and economic life, and the complex of ideas and long-cherished prejudices which the British people have held in regard to India. To solve the problem meant the knocking out of the bottom of that structure and the smothering of those ancient ideas and prejudices. It meant the ending of the imperialist tradition and the winding-up of the Empire. So attention was diverted to the failings, real or imaginary, of the Indian people, to the supposed fact that India was not a nation at all with all its races, castes, and languages, that it was largely illiterate, and of course to the communal problem. Much could be said about these various matters which would go to show that they were, after all, not so important as they were thought to be. But quite apart from their truth or importance, other facts stand out: the terrible poverty of India, the vast unemployment among all classes, the problems of land and industry, the continuing repression and denial of civil liberty by which the British Government seeks to convince us that we are being given a large dose of self-government. These problems cannot be tackled by protecting the very interests that create them and flourish on them.

The Conservative reaction was simple enough, and its very simplicity gave it an air of romance. They had few doubts or difficulties, no complexes over India. For an Indian it was a little difficult to discuss this question with them, in spite of their amiability, for we started from entirely different premises and looked different ways. We could find no common ground to stand on, no agreement to form the basis of argument. The British Empire was good, very good and beneficial to all concerned, and bound to endure. Unhappily it was surrounded by evil elements, full of spite and jealousy, who created difficulties in the smooth working of this ideal institution. If these objectionable elements could be made to see straight or be suppressed, all would be well. Some of the left-wing Conservatives were a little troubled at the close association of their party with all the reactionary and feudal elements in India; they even thought that some economic changes were necessary. But, on the whole, these ideas did not affect the essential serenity of their outlook.

Those who might be called Liberals did not differ greatly, but they were troubled more at what was happening in India, and vague fears of the future prevented them from enjoying the calm of peaceful contemplation which might otherwise have been theirs. Bred up in the traditions of civil liberty and democracy, they felt a little uneasy at the ruthless suppression in India of much they had in England. But only a little. For India was different and far away, and it was possible to still the qualms of conscience and principle by the consoling thought that, but for the repression, India might go to pieces and be converted into a sea of blood. As for democracy, were there not substantial beginnings of it in the India Act with its wider franchise, and safeguards and special powers have a way of falling into desuetude under democratic institutions? So all was well, and it was possible, with a certain measure of equanimity, to accept the present position in India, and at the same time to condemn wholeheartedly the dictatorships and suppression of freedom in Germany, Russia, Italy, the Balkans, and elsewhere.

More interesting because they were more complicated were the reactions of the Labour groups. They varied of course greatly from the Communist, looking forward to social revolution, to the Trade Union leader, vaguely wishing well to India and everybody but moving in a narrow sphere of wages and hours of work and the building up of an organization which might gain a majority in Parliament and lead to a Labour Government. It was not clear what would happen when this desirable result was achieved.

There were many individuals in the Labour movement, as well as groups, who had pinned their faith on Socialism and who were prepared to apply these principles to India. They realized that imperialism was a barrier to all real progress both in India and England, and in the ultimate interests of both this must go. It was easy for me to discuss our mutual problems with them with this basis of agreement. But for the Labour Party as a whole there was no such realization, and even when an uncomfortable feeling came that some such fundamental change was inevitable, it was sternly suppressed, and as practical men and women they faced the problem of the next Labour Government. With all their dislike for it they moved in the orbit of imperialism, and felt powerless to step out of it. Events might of course force their hands, but the initiative was not likely to come from them. They were unhappy about the past record of their party in regard to India and they wanted to make amends, but within that circle of Empire that encompassed them there was not much room for movement. And there was always the

fear that any stepping out of that circle might endanger their electoral prospects and lessen their reputation for practical and respectable statesmanship.

The Labour Party has moved to the right in recent years; the drift is likely to continue. Even in earlier days its record in India was indistinguishable from that of other parties and governments, and it gathered to itself the deep distrust of the Indian people. It will not be easy to remove this and, even with all the goodwill that many of its members undoubtedly possess for India, it can hardly do much to regain the confidence of the Indian people, unless it moves out of the circle that closes round it and makes it afraid of its own professions. A Labour Government may come back some time in the future, and much is likely to happen in India before then. Even when it comes, it will be nervous and lacking confidence in itself; it will be afraid of all manner of vested interests, and the House of Lords will be there to see that it behaves. Only international catastrophes and major events in India or elsewhere will shake it out of its lethargy.

Very interesting were many non-party men whom I met, sensitive men who though not wedded to any well-defined political policy were keenly aware of the world's disorder and of approaching catastrophe, and anxious to do their best to avert it. India was a secondary question in their minds and they were absorbed by dangers of war and the crisis of modern civilization. Mostly their approach was psychological and humanitarian, and I felt drawn towards it. And yet I felt there was something lacking in it; it was vague and idealistic without much reference to hard and cruel reality, and it did not promise any definite results. Nevertheless a widespread realization of the folly and evil in the present-day world and an ardent desire to end them was in itself a significant and hopeful sign.

The problem of India is an essential part of the world crisis, for India is the classic and most important symbol of modern imperialism. Within the fabric of imperialism there can be no solution of that crisis; it will have to go, root and branch, and the sooner this is realized and worked for, the nearer we shall all be to a solution of the world's difficulties. That seems to me the only way, and it is the way of Socialism. With that realization will come mutual confidence and co-operation between the progressive elements of India and England. Such problems as remain—and there will be many, for the period of transition is always full of difficulty—can then be faced and solved with mutual consideration and with a view to healing the world's ills. Otherwise there can only be continuous

conflict and friction, with occasional eruptions bringing suffering and misery to large numbers.

Perhaps conflict is inevitable and we cannot escape it. Under present conditions it cannot be avoided, for the policy the British Government has pursued in India is a continuous invitation to conflict. But even if conflict continues, cannot it be made a little more civilized than what we have had in the past? Is it not possible to end or tone down at least the Fascist methods of brutal suppression of a sensitive people struggling for their freedom, which the British Government has been pursuing interminably for years past?

Whatever the future may hold, I shall carry back with me to India the knowledge that there is a fund of goodwill in England for the Indian struggle, and we have many true comrades here who stand for the same Socialist ideal as many of us do and we can work together for a common cause.

## CHAPTER IX

*A Letter from an Englishman*<sup>1</sup>

WE are in the midst of one of the most creative epochs in human history. We are gradually moving, on the one hand, along the line of the ideals represented by the League of Nations, to the ending of war through the establishment of a reign of law among equal, self-governing states and therefore to the ending also of what is almost worse than war the hatreds, fears, suspicions, ignorances, poverty and unemployment, which are all created or stimulated by the present anarchy of sovereign states. We are moving on the other hand towards the realization of the ideals represented by the word socialism, a system whereby the earth and its fruits will be exploited for the benefit of all members of the community, in proportion to the services they render to it and not according to the accident of property ownership. In both cases the achievement of the end is

<sup>1</sup> This letter from Lord Lothian, written in December 1935, and Nehru's reply which follows, appear in *A Bunch of Old Letters*, Asia Publishing House.

likely to be by methods very different from the Covenant of the League of Nations on the one hand or universal nationalization of the instruments of production and distribution and their management by the state on the other. It may take decades, perhaps centuries, to accomplish these ends for success involves a profound transformation of the deeper habits of opinion and of character, and the 'putting on' of new capacities for responsibility, before the new legislation and new machinery can be brought into being. But in the end these ideals will be realized, for enough people have seen the vision, though very few, if any, yet see the means thereto.

Britain and India have different roles to play at the moment. Britain is shedding the old imperialism and is actively concerned with trying to find the way to prevent the anarchy involved in universal national self-determination from ending in fresh wars or in a new deluge of imperialism. She will also shortly embark on the practical problem of reconciling socialism with the liberal tradition of individual liberty and initiative. India has the tremendous task of assuming responsibility for her own government and enacting the social and economic reforms which are urgently necessary without losing her unity and so following Europe into the anarchy of religious and nationalist wars, which has been the principal cause of the deterioration of modern civilization.

You will ask me how is it possible for India to accomplish her ends through the Constitution which has been passed. Defective as no doubt it is, especially from your standpoint, I would ask you to consider whether it is possible for India to do so except through the Constitution and developments inherent in it.

Unfortunately, in politics, we none of us can start with a clean slate. We have always to start from facts emerging out of history. It is the function of statesmanship to determine how far it is possible at any point of time to reconcile idealism and fact. Despite the appalling poverty of the masses of India and the consequences which follow from that poverty, and the difficulty of remedying it quickly, it seems to be that the greatest single disaster which menaces India is the risk of a breakdown in its governmental or constitutional unity. The only greater risk would be acquiescence in domination by Britain or some other alien power. I believe that this second risk has disappeared, unless India proves unable to maintain her own internal unity as a self-governing community, because of the strength of the Indian national movement and of the decision taken by Great Britain to overrule the diehards and transfer the ultimate keys of power through the Constitution Act

passed last August. My reasons for so interpreting the Constitution are fully set forth in an article on the Constitution which I wrote for the Indian *Twentieth Century* (and of which I venture to enclose a copy), and I will not repeat them here. But the first risk remains. Unless the experience of the rest of the world is to be entirely falsified, as power passes into the hands of the political classes in India and as education and the press increase their influence, religion, race and language will assume increasing political importance and power and will become increasingly fissiparous in effect. Today, in India, religion is still the most powerful influence with the masses as it was in Europe as the mediaeval Catholic Church and the Holy Roman Empire weakened under the Renaissance and the Reformation and as it remained until science, education and the ideas of the French Revolution had undermined the supreme political power of religion by creating new political and economic loyalties. For 100 years Europe was soaked in blood (the population of Germany was reduced from 30,000,000 to 5,000,000) in wars largely based on the conflict between Catholicism and Protestantism only to find itself equally soaked in blood first in the wars between the monarchies which replaced Emperor and Pope and later of nationalisms based on race and language. Together these have now utterly destroyed its old unity, and have produced an anarchy of tariffs and armaments and war which is the root of Europe's demoralization and decline. The last phase of the operation of these forces has been seen in Ireland where, even when England had at last been forced to concede Dominion Home Rule, religion reinforced by race compelled the political severance of Scots Protestant Ulster from Celtic Roman Catholic Ireland.

You may say that I am ignoring the economic factor—the Marxian thesis. I don't think I am. Marx overstates the case for the materialist or economic interpretation of history. Economics profoundly influence and in some degree control current religious, political and social thinking, but they are essentially secondary. Capitalism stimulates acquisitiveness but it also immensely raises the standard of living. It also exaggerates the evils of international anarchy, but it does not create it. It may produce competition, but it does not create civil war inside the state. In any case I do not think there is any doubt that in practical politics the political phase comes first—except in the wholly exceptional circumstances of Russia when you had the collapse of an effete Tsarism through defeat in an external war combined with the existence of an exceptionally well-led revolutionary movement, which established a party dictatorship over almost all phases of life by using tactics to which

humanity was then unaccustomed and in a country where there was practically no middle class. Except in this case people respond to political motives based upon religion, race or language before they respond to conscious economic motives. That has been the history of Europe, ever since the Russian Revolution, and it is now accepted, I think, by the left wing, that even when the economic motive begins to supplant these other motives, it is Fascism which wins—not Communism, once the revolutionary method supplants the democratic and the constitutional road.

If the constitutional road is rejected in India it seems to me almost inevitable that India will follow the example of Europe and start with religious wars, for the mass of the people will still, I think, respond to religious feelings once they are stimulated for political purposes, out of which she will emerge not as a unity but, like Europe, divided into a number of dictatorial states separated by race and language and armed to the teeth against one another both militarily and economically with their internal development consequently paralysed, or she will once more fall under the control of some external Imperialist power as is happening in China. It is sometimes said—the Mahatma once said it to me—that the way of catastrophe may be the best way forward. There may be times when that is true. But I believe them to be extremely rare and only when there is no other hope. It is quite true that if Indian Government collapsed and the inevitable rival armies began to appear and she went through what China is going through, though worse because of the greater differences in religion, race and language in India, that certain social and economic evils might disappear. But these periods destroy—as the great war destroyed—the elementary traditions and decencies and habits without which no civilized life—socialist or individualist—can be built up and which only grow when struggle for progress, social or political, takes place within constitutional forms and not through war.

I think that the greatest political figure that the democratic world has thrown up is Abraham Lincoln. He had intense feeling for the common people but he saw that the supreme issue in the United States was not slavery, but the Union. If the Union went, not only would slavery persist but America itself would become, like Europe, divided into national states, each drawing different racial and linguistic elements from Europe and separated by tariffs and armaments and so condemned to frustration, poverty and recurrent war and to the ending of the Monroe Doctrine and of the great experiment in democracy launched in 1787. So he refused to fight on slavery and centred the struggle on the defence of the

Union seeing that by securing this not only would these fatal evils be avoided but slavery itself would inevitably be ended also.

I feel that the supreme question for India and one of the supreme questions for the world today, is whether India is going to work out its salvation as a fundamentally democratic and constitutional federation, or by way of catastrophe. If she decides for the former the very spirit of her institutions will gradually transform the Indian States into constitutional monarchies, will overrule communalism and race and language with an Indian patriotism and public spirit and will gradually enable it to take full control of its own government and make possible the combination of socialism with reasonable individual liberty. But if India loses its constitutional unity everything is lost. She goes into the abyss, loses her identity as a nation and the capacity to control her own destiny. Without government there can be neither self-government nor socialism.

But, you will repeat, how is it possible for India to attain to real internal unity, to take over responsibility for her own government, to effect the internal social and economic reforms vital to her peace and true prosperity, through a constitution based on communalism, on innumerable safeguards in the hands of Great Britain and on the entrenchment of every vested interest and property right? My answer is twofold. In the first place, I don't think any fundamentally different constitution has been possible unless Congress had been in a position to dictate it by being in possession itself of all governmental powers and in a position to use them to repress all opposition to itself and enforce conformity. You are in an infinitely better position than I am to judge whether the main strength of the Congress is derived from its being the central organization determined to get rid of alien rule and exploiting an anti-foreign form of nationalism, or whether, if the British Raj were suddenly to disappear, Congress would command the allegiance of the Moslems, the Princes, the propertied classes and the masses, sufficiently to conduct all-India government on constitutional lines. My own impression certainly is that at no time could Congress have established a liberal constitution for all-India, by consent, except by making in fundamentals, though not in detail, the same kind of concessions to communalism, to the Princes and to property as are contained in the present constitution, and that if it had attempted to establish itself in power by force it would have found itself confronted by civil war and would have been compelled either to attempt to create a police-military dictatorship and go in for all those forms of violent repression (from which you yourself

have suffered) which are inherent in any form of autocracy, or to abandon the attempt to maintain the unity of India at all. I don't think, therefore, that there has ever been, as a matter of practical politics, any alternative to the present constitution in its main outlines.

My second answer is that within the constitution there is room for indefinite growth and that, with all the defects you must see in it, it is the best available channel through which the growing political and social vitality of India can develop the experience and muscles necessary for government and social and economic reform. I won't repeat in this letter the arguments for thinking that the road is wide open whereby India can attain to the independence represented by the Statute of Westminster as quickly as she develops political parties and constitutional habits strong and wise enough to carry the strain of all-India government and defence. They are set forth fully in my *Twentieth Century* article. I would only add that while the safeguards may be of vital value in preventing a breakdown of government in so vast and diverse a territory as India in the earlier transitional stages, they cannot possibly, in a country full of universities and popular newspapers, resist the onset of political opinion and organization in demanding the transfer of responsibility to ministries responsible to popularly elected legislatures—provided those ministries and legislatures are reasonably competent to discharge the primary functions of government. They may delay it a little. But they cannot stop it. The whole history of responsible government proves this everywhere.

Further, the Constitution gives full scope for the growth of those political parties, concerned with political, social and economic reform, which are the dynamic force which puts force and vitality into the constitutional machine. It provides, too, an adequate popular foundation on which such parties can begin to work, for over 40 per cent of the adult male population will be enfranchised.

Again, the constitution itself contains possibilities of unlimited growth by constitutional means. Under the system of responsible government the most fundamental changes, at any rate in the transference of power and responsibility to new hands, take place through alterations in the conventions and practice rather [than] in the letter of the constitution. For instance the establishment of the power of Parliament in this country and of Dominion status overseas has mostly happened by the usage that 'advice' has gradually become mandatory. Further, the system whereby changes in the text of the constitution must be mainly made by Parliament here, while objectionable to national *amour propre*, has certain

practical advantages. The great difficulty with all constitutions is to provide a means by which they cannot be altered by ordinary party politics but can be altered when there is really a national demand. Constitutions which are too easily altered by party action tend to collapse into chaos or dictatorship, and those which are too rigid prevent real social and economic progress. The system which has fostered the growth of Dominion independence has solved the problem—in practice—very well, for it means that alterations can easily be made but only if they command something like national consent not a mere party victory.

I cannot exaggerate, therefore, the importance I attach to the fact that, like the United States in 1787, India is being launched on its self-governing life on the basis of a written constitution which can be moulded, easily but not too easily, to meet her developing needs. It is the fashion now to make light of constitutions. That is because in the absence of a world constitution—the central need of the time—interstate anarchy has produced such unemployment, war and dictatorship as to make constitutional government impossible in country after country. It is absolutely vital that India should not be drawn into this maelstrom of anarchy and war through losing her own unity.

I think, therefore, that the most important urgent need in India today is not the form of constitution but that she should develop a virile, constructive, creative party life—at least two parties each capable of commanding sufficient allegiance from all parts and sections of India to enable them to carry the tremendous strains of Indian Government. It is through the struggles between idealism and reaction, corruption and purity, public spirit and loaves and fishes inside each party and in the warfare between parties (none the less vehement because it is constitutional) and the judgment of the electorate thereon, that the political growth of any people and its preparation for social and economic reform is made. It is through this kneading of the collective mind, by parties which have had the discipline which comes from having carried responsibility for government and for giving effect to their own promises and ideals, that the elimination of communalism and separate electorates, the growth of representative institutions in the states, the development of a true Indian Army, the readjustment of economic relations between Britain and India, the raising of the standard of living of the people, the challenge to vested interests and the emergence of power to resist mere vote-catching, will come about. The most important thing today, whatever views one may have about the ultimate future, is that the youth of India, male and female, should

begin to acquire that constructive practical experience which will come from dealing with an electorate of over 30,000,000 people, and electing some 2,000 members to some twelve legislatures who will be responsible for the greater part of Indian Government, and for formulating the plans both for social and common reform and for taking over the other responsibilities for Indian Government, in practice and subject to the discipline of fact and criticism and result and not of theory. That is the necessary foundation for all else.

One word in conclusion. You will very likely reply that all this ignores the Marxian or economic diagnosis of history, that the establishment of socialism is impossible by constitutional means and can only come by revolutionary dictatorship based on proletarian class-consciousness. At the end of this already prodigious letter I am not going to enter upon the Socialist-individualist debate. I would only say that I think the great majority of Socialist thinkers in this country have made up their minds that it is possible to carry through the Socialist ideal by the machinery of the democratic state and that it is the best way of accomplishing their aims both because it preserves the gains of the liberal era and prevents Fascism, which today precedes Communism. And I will bring to my support not arguments of my own, but a little book, *Modern Trends in Socialism*, written by a number of young Socialists which has interested me a good deal—edited by a friend of mine, G. E. G. Catlin.

Finally, I must apologize for this immense letter. But, after working all these years, I feel I am justified in putting in front of one of the leaders of the India of tomorrow some of the fundamental views I have reached on the future. Congress has now to choose between the catastrophic and the constitutional road and I feel I ought at least to give you what seem to me some reasons, derived from European experience, in favour of the latter and against the former.

## CHAPTER X

*A Letter to an Englishman*

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I ENTIRELY agree with you that we are in the midst of one of the most creative and changing epochs in human history. It does seem that we have reached an end of an era and are on the threshold of another. I also agree that the two ideals which are moving most intelligent and sensitive persons are: the ending of the present anarchy of sovereign States, with their hatreds, fears, and conflicts, and the creation of a world order; and the socialistic ideal, aiming at 'a system whereby the earth and its fruits will be exploited for the benefit of all members of the community in proportion for the services they render to it, and not according to the accident of property ownership'. The League of Nations, you say, represents the former ideal. I think this is so in so far as it represents a widespread sentiment. In actual practice, however, it hardly functions that way, and it represents the policies of certain Great Powers who have no intention of giving up their privileged positions, or their absolute sovereignty, and who endeavour to utilize the League to make the world safe for themselves.

Another question arises. Even if the people behind the League honestly desired the ending of the anarchy of sovereign States, or were pushed by popular opinion in that direction, could they succeed in that objective without changing fundamentally the social order—without, in other words, accepting Socialism? Of course they would have to shed their imperialism. The League today does not look beyond the present capitalistic system; indeed, it does not even contemplate an ending of imperialism. It is essentially based on the *status quo* and its chief function is to preserve it. In practice, therefore, it is actually a hindrance to the realization of the very ideal which many people think it represents. If it is true, as I believe it is, that imperialism and the anarchy of sovereign States are inevitable developments of the present phase of capitalism, then it follows that you cannot get rid of the former without also getting rid of the latter. But in practice the League has little to do with its supposed ideals, and even puts difficulties in the way of their

realization; but even its ideals, by themselves, are such that they lead to a blind alley. It is not surprising that it finds itself frequently involved in hopeless contradictions. It simply cannot go ahead on the basis of the *status quo* because the root of the trouble is that *status quo* both in its imperialist and social aspects. It is right and proper that the League should condemn Italian aggression in Abyssinia and try to curb it, but the very system which it protects and seeks to perpetuate inevitably leads to that aggression. There is no valid answer for an imperialist to Mussolini's taunt that he is doing what other imperialist powers have done before, and are doing now, though not in his particularly blatant way. It does seem rather illogical to condemn Italian bombing in East Africa, and maintain a dignified silence about British bombing in the North-West Frontier of India.

You yourself are of opinion that the achievement of the end is not likely to be by the method of the Covenant of the League. The League, therefore, offers little hope, except in so far as it represents a vague but widespread sentiment in favour of world order and peace. It helps sometimes in mobilizing that sentiment and in postponing conflict.

The two ideals you have mentioned run into each other, and I do not think they can be separated. The second ideal, of Socialism, indeed, includes the first, and it may be said that real world order and peace will only come when Socialism is realized on a world scale. It is perfectly true, as you say, that real Socialism involves a profound transformation of the deeper habits of opinion and of character, and this inevitably takes time. Under favourable circumstances, and with the goodwill of a large number of people concerned, these changes may be brought about within a generation. But as things are, instead of that goodwill we have the fiercest opposition and ill will, and it is therefore likely that the period will be a much longer one. The main question for us to consider is how to create an environment and circumstances under which these deeper changes can take place. Only that will be a real step in the right direction. Under present circumstances the environment is against us, and instead of lessening our mutual hatreds and selfishness and acquisitiveness, which lead to conflict, actually encourages these evil traits. It is true that in spite of these grave disadvantages some progress is made, and some of us at least begin to challenge our old habits and opinions. But the process is very slow, and it is almost counterbalanced by the growth of contrary tendencies.

Capitalism has stimulated acquisitiveness and these deeper instincts which we want to get rid of now. It did much good also in

its earlier stages, and by raising production greatly increased the standard of living. In other ways, too, it served a useful purpose, and it was certainly an improvement on the stage that preceded it. But it seems to have outlived its utility, and today it not only bars all progress in a socialistic direction, but encourages many undesirable habits and instincts in us. I do not see how we can move along socialistic lines in a society which is based on acquisitiveness, and in which the profit motive is the dominant urge. It thus becomes necessary to change the basis of this acquisitive society, and to remove the profit motive, as far as we can, in order to develop new and more desirable habits and ways of thinking. That involves a complete change-over from the capitalist system.

It is true, as you state, that the capitalist system has not created international anarchy; it merely succeeded to it. It has in the past removed or lessened actual civil war within the State, but it has intensified the conflict of classes, which has grown to such an extent as to threaten civil war in the future. In the international sphere it has perpetuated anarchy on a bigger scale, and, instead of petty local wars, it has brought about vast and terrible national conflicts. And so, though it does not create this anarchy, it inevitably increases it, and cannot put an end to it unless it puts an end to itself. It has produced the modern imperialisms which not only crush and exploit large parts of the earth's surface and vast numbers of people, but also come into continual conflict with each other.

It may be that Marx overstates the case for the materialist or economic interpretation of history. Perhaps he did so for the simple reason that it had been largely ignored, or at any rate very much understated till then. But Marx never denied the influence of other factors on the shaping of events. He laid the greatest stress on one—the economic factor. Whether that stress was a little overdone does not make much difference. The fact remains, I think, that his interpretation of history is the only one which does explain history to some extent and give it meaning. It helps us to understand the present, and it is quite remarkable how many of his predictions have come true.

How will Socialism come? You say that it is not likely to be achieved by the universal nationalization of the instruments of production and distribution. Must it not involve the ending of the profit and acquisitive motive and the replacement of it by a communal and co-operative motive? And does it not involve the building up of a new civilization on a different basis from that of the present? It may be that a great deal of private initiative is left; in some matters, cultural, etc., it must be left. But in all that counts,

in a material sense, nationalization of the instruments of production and distribution seems to be inevitable. There may be half-way houses to it, but one can hardly have two contradictory and conflicting processes going on side by side. The choice must be made, and for one who aims at Socialism there can only be one choice.

I think it is possible, in theory, to establish Socialism by democratic means, provided of course the full democratic process is available. In practice, however, there are likely to be very great difficulties, because the opponents of Socialism will reject the democratic method when they see their power threatened. The rejection of democracy does not, or should not, come from the Socialist side, but from the other. That of course is Fascism. How is this to be avoided? The democratic method has many triumphs to its credit, but I do not know that it has yet succeeded in resolving a conflict about the very basic structure of the State or of society. When this question arises, the group or class which controls the State-power does not voluntarily give it up because the majority demands it. We have seen enough examples of it in post-war Europe and the decline of democracy itself. Obviously no Socialist transformation can be brought about without the goodwill, or at least the passive acquiescence, of the great majority.

Coming to Britain and India, I find a large number of assumptions in your letter which I think have little justification. As I do not agree with many of your premises, I also find myself in disagreement with some of your conclusions. You say that 'Britain is shedding the old imperialism and is actively concerned with trying to find the way to prevent the anarchy involved in universal national self-determination from ending in fresh wars, or in a new deluge of imperialism'. I am afraid I entirely fail to see that Britain is acting in this role. I do not see any shedding of the old imperialism, but repeated and strenuous attempts to hold on to it, and to strengthen it, though a new façade is presented to the public view in some instances. Britain certainly does not want fresh wars. She is a satisfied and surfeited Power. Why should she risk what she has got? She wants to maintain the *status quo* which is eminently to her advantage. She dislikes new imperialisms because they conflict with her old imperialism, and not because of any dislike of imperialism itself.

You refer also to the 'constitutional road' in India. What exactly is this constitutional road? I can understand constitutional activities where there is a democratic constitution, but where there is no such thing constitutional methods have no meaning. The word

constitutional then simply means legal, and legal ~~simply~~ means in accordance with the wishes of an autocratic executive which can make laws and issue decrees and ordinances regardless of public opinion. What is the constitutional method in Germany or Italy today? What was this method in the India of the nineteenth century or of the early twentieth century, or even now? There was no possibility of bringing about a change in India then (or now) through any constitutional apparatus which the people of India could sufficiently influence. They could only beg or revolt. The mere fact that it is impossible for the great majority of the people of India to make their will effective shows that they have no constitutional way open to them. They can either submit to something they dislike intensely, or adopt other than so-called constitutional methods. Such methods may be wise or unwise, under the particular circumstances, but the question of their being constitutional or not does not arise.

Most of us, I suppose, are unable to get rid of our particular national bias, and often ignore the beam in our own eyes. I realize that I must be subject to this, especially when I consider the relation of Britain and India. You will allow for that. Nevertheless I must say that nothing astonishes me so much as the way the British people manage to combine their material interests with their moral fervour; how they proceed on the irrefutable presumption that they are always doing good to the world and acting from the highest motives, and trouble and conflict and difficulty are caused by the obstinacy and evil-mindedness of others. That presumption, as you know, is not universally accepted, and in Europe and America and Asia it is the subject of humorous comment. In India especially we may be forgiven if we reject it utterly after our experience of British rule in the past and present. To talk of democracy and constitutionalism in India, in the face of what has happened and is happening there, seems to me to distort utterly the significance of these terms. Ruling powers and ruling classes have not been known in history to abdicate willingly. And if the teaching of history was not enough, we in India have had enough experience of hard facts.

It is true, I think, that the British ruling classes possess a certain instinct for adaptability, but when the very basis of their power is challenged there is little room for superficial adaptation. For anyone to imagine that the British Government or Parliament are kindly trustees for Indian freedom and are beneficently presiding over its development seems to me one of the most extraordinary of delusions. I believe there are many Britishers who feel kindly towards India and her people, and would like to see India free, but they count for

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little in the shaping of policy, and even they, or most of them, think in terms of Indian freedom fitting in with British desires and interests. More freedom, greater responsibility, will come to us, we are told, as we show our fitness for it, and the test of this is how far we fit in with the British scheme of things. One almost feels like suggesting to our mentors and well-wishers in England to renew their acquaintance with *Æsop's Fables*, and especially to read afresh the story of the wolf and the lamb.

It is perfectly true that in politics, as in most other things, we cannot start with a clean slate. It is also true that life is often too complex for human logic. We have to take things as they are, whether we like them or not, and to reconcile our idealism with them. But we must move in the right direction. This means, according to you, first of all the preservation of the unity of India and then the elimination of communalism, the control and gradual divesting of vested interests, and the raising of the standard of living of the people, the development of a true Indian army, and the training of the youth of India in constructive practical work required in a democratic State. Beyond all this lies the socialistic ideal, and the general background must be such as to develop those deeper instincts and habits which are necessary for the real working of this ideal.

I suppose many of us would agree with that statement so far as it goes, though we may word it differently, and add to it, and stress some points more than others. I agree with you also that the political phase comes first; indeed, without that phase there is no other phase. It may be accompanied by social changes, or followed soon after by them. Personally, I am perfectly prepared to accept political democracy only, in the hope that this will lead to social democracy. Political democracy is only the way to the goal, and is not the final objective. The real demand for it comes from a desire, sometimes unconscious, for economic changes. If these changes do not follow soon enough the political structure is likely to be unstable. I am inclined to think that in India, circumstanced as she is today, the need for economic change is urgent, and a vital political change will inevitably be accompanied or followed by substantial economic changes. In any event the political change should be such as to facilitate these social changes. If it becomes a barrier to them then it is not a desirable change, or one worth having.

I am not aware of any responsible Indian who thinks in terms other than the unity of India. That is an essential article of our political faith and anything that we do has that for its goal. That unity, I agree, is likely to be a federal unity, but that does not mean

of course anything like the federation of the new Act. That unity also is not the unity of subjection under a common yoke. It is possible that a period of chaos might result in disunity and the formation of separate States in India, but that danger seems to me very unreal. The tendency to unity is too strong all over the country.

The disruptive factors are according to you: religion, race, and language. I do not see the importance of race. Race in India became intertwined with religion, and partly took the shape of caste. Hindus and Moslems do not form different races; they are essentially the same amalgam of races. Thus, though there are various races, they run into one another and on the whole form a definite unit, racially and culturally. The so-called hundreds of languages of India are a favourite subject for our critics, who usually have little acquaintance with any of them. As a matter of fact India is linguistically singularly well knit, and it is only due to the absence of popular education that numerous dialects have grown. There are ten major languages of India which cover the entire country, except for some small tracts. These belong to the two groups—Indo-Aryan and Dravidian—and between the two there is the common background of Sanskrit. Of the Indo-Aryan languages, I suppose you know that Hindustani with its various dialects accounts for over 120,000,000 of people, and it is spreading. The other Indo-Aryan languages—Bengali, Gujarati and Marathi—are very closely allied to it. I am sure that whatever other difficulties we may have to face in the way of Indian unity, the language question will not be a major difficulty.

You compare the state of religion in India with that of Europe at the time of the Renaissance and the Reformation. It is true that the people of India have a definite religious outlook which is comparable to the outlook in Europe during the Middle Ages. Still your comparison does not go below the surface. India has never known in the whole course of her long history the religious strife that has soaked Europe in blood. The whole background of Indian religion, culture, and philosophy was one of tolerance, and even encouragement of other beliefs. Some conflict arose when Islam came, but even that was far more political than religious, although stress is always laid on the religious side. It was the conflict between the conquerors and the conquered. In spite of recent developments I cannot easily envisage religious conflict in India on any substantial scale. The communalism of today is essentially political, economic, and middle-class. I imagine (but I say so without personal knowledge) that the religious bitterness in Ulster today is far more deep-seated than anywhere in India. It is a fact that one must never forget that communalism in India is a latter-day phenomenon which has grown up

before our eyes. That does not lessen its significance, and we may not ignore it, for it is at present a tremendous obstacle in our way and is likely to interfere with our future progress. And yet I think it is overrated and overemphasized; it does not fundamentally affect the masses, although sometimes their passions are roused. With the coming of social issues to the forefront it is bound to recede into the background. Examine the communal demands of the extreme communalists and you will find that not a single one of them has the slightest reference<sup>1</sup> to the masses. These communal leaders of all groups are terribly afraid of social and economic questions, and it is interesting to find them joining hands in their opposition to social progress.

British rule in India has inevitably helped in creating political unity in the country. The mere fact of common subjection was bound to result in a common desire to be rid of it. It must be remembered—a fact that is not sufficiently realized—that throughout history there has been a quite extraordinary sense of cultural and geographical unity in India, and the desire for political unity was bound to grow under modern conditions of transport and communication. Throughout the British period, however, there has been an attempt on the part of the ruling power, partly conscious and deliberate, partly unconscious, to retard this unity. That, of course, was only to be expected, for that has been the invariable policy of all empires and ruling groups. It is interesting to read the frank expressions of opinion of high officers in India during the nineteenth century. The problem was then not very urgent, but with the growth of the nationalist movement, and especially during the last thirty years, it became acute. The reaction of the British Government was to devise new methods for creating and, if possible, perpetuating these divisions. Obviously no one can say that there was not an inherent tendency towards division in India, and with the prospect of the approach of political power, this was likely to grow. It was possible to adopt a policy to tone down this tendency; it was also possible to accentuate it. The Government adopted the latter policy and encouraged in every way every fissiparous tendency in the country. It is not possible for them or for anyone to stop the historical growth of the people, but they can and they have put checks and obstructions in the way. And the latest and most important of these are in the new Act.<sup>1</sup> You commend this Act because it symbolizes the unity of India. As a matter of fact it is the very reverse; it is the prelude (if it is not combated) of greater disunity. It divides up India into religious and numerous other compartments,

<sup>1</sup> Government of India Act, 1935.

preserves large parts of it as feudal enclaves which cannot be touched, but which can influence other parts, and checks the growth of healthy political parties on social and economic issues, which you consider 'the most important and urgent need in India today'.

The policy of the British Government on social issues is equally marked. Far from looking towards any form of Socialism or control or divesting of vested interests, it has deliberately protected numerous vested interests, created fresh ones, and invariably sided with the political, social, and religious reactionaries in India. The new Act is again the culmination of this policy, and at no time before have these vested interests and obscurantists and reactionaries had so much power as they will have under the new federal India. The Act legally bars the door to that social progress which, according to you, should be our goal, by protecting and entrenching these vested interests, foreign and Indian. Even small measures of social reform are hardly within reach, as a very great part of the financial resources of the State are mortgaged and ear-marked for the maintenance of vested interests.

Every country today has to put up a stiff fight against the forces of reaction and evil. India is no exception to the rule. The tragedy of the situation is that the British people, without being conscious of it, stand today through their Parliament and officials entirely on the side of the forces of evil in India. What they would not tolerate for an instant in their own country, they encourage in India. You mention the great name of Abraham Lincoln, and remind me of the great importance he attached to the Union. Presumably you think that the British Government, in trying to suppress the Congress movement, was actuated by the same noble motive of maintaining the unity of India in the face of disruptive forces. I do not quite see how the unity of India was threatened by that movement—indeed I think that that movement or some similar movement alone can bring about an organic unity in the country, and the British Government's activities push us in a contrary direction. But apart from this, do you not think that the comparison of Lincoln with the attempt of an imperialist power to crush the freedom movement in a country subject to it is very far-fetched?

You want to eradicate undesirable and selfish habits and instincts in the people. Do you think that the British in India are helping in this direction? Quite apart from their support of the reactionary elements, the background of British rule is worth considering. It is, of course, based on an extreme form of widespread violence, and the only sanction is fear. It suppresses the usual liberties which are supposed to be essential to the growth of a people; it crushes the

adventurous, the brave, the sensitive types, and encourages the timid, the opportunist and the time-serving, the sneak and the bully. It surrounds itself with a vast army of spies and informers and *agents provocateurs*. Is this the atmosphere in which the more desirable virtues grow or democratic institutions flourish?

You ask me whether the Congress could at any time have established a liberal constitution for all India by consent, except by making in fundamentals the same kind of concessions to communalism, to the Princes, and to property. That presumes that the present Act establishes a liberal constitution by consent. If this constitution is a liberal one it is difficult for me to imagine what an illiberal constitution can be like, and as for consent, I doubt that anything that the British Government have ever done in India has been quite so much resented and disapproved of as the new Act. Incidentally, the measures to obtain the necessary consent involved the fiercest repression all over the country, and even now, as a prelude to the enforcement of the Act, all-India and provincial laws suppressing all kinds of civil liberty have been passed. To talk of consent under these circumstances does seem most extraordinary. There is an amazing amount of misconception about this in England. If the problem has to be faced the dominant facts cannot be ignored.

It is true that the Government has succeeded in making some arrangement with the Princes and with various minority groups, but even these groups are highly dissatisfied except, to some extent, with the minor arrangements affecting their representation. Take the principal minority, the Moslems. No one can say that the aristocratic, semi-feudal, and other handpicked Moslem members of the Round Table Conference represented the Moslem masses. You may be surprised to know that the Congress has still considerable Moslem backing.

Could the Congress have done better? I have no doubt that the nationalist movement, of which the Congress is the symbol and the principal standard-bearer, could have done infinitely better. The Congress is of course a bourgeois organization (I wish it were more socialistic), and therefore the property qualification would not have arisen in acute form at this stage. The communal question would have had to be faced and, I think, solved for the time being at least with a large measure of consent. Probably some degree of communalism would have remained to begin with, but far less than what we are presented with under the new Act. What is more important—circumstances would have been created for the elimination of communalism in the near future and for growth along social lines; and the land problem would have been tackled. The real

difficulties would have been two: the vested interests of the British Government and the City of London, and the Princes. The former represent the crux of the question, all else is really secondary. The Princes would, under the circumstances, have adapted themselves to a considerable extent to the new situation, and the Congress, constituted as it is today, would have given them a long enough rope. The pressure of public opinion, including that of their own subjects, would have been too great for them to resist. Probably some temporary arrangement might have been made with the Indian States to begin with to enable this public opinion to come into play and shape developments. Presuming of course that the British Government is not there to back up the undiluted autocracy of the Princes, there is little doubt that the States would gradually fall into line. No question of civil conflict need have arisen.

All this would have been very far from what I desire, but it would at least have been a definite political and democratic step in the right direction. In the framing of a constitution or a political structure it is manifestly impossible to get everyone concerned to agree. One tries to have the maximum agreement, and the others who do not agree either fall into line according to democratic procedure, or have to be pressed or coerced into doing so. The British Government, representing the autocratic and authoritarian tradition, and chiefly bent on preserving their own interests, tried to win the consent of the Princes and some other reactionary elements, and coerced the vast majority of the people. The Congress would have inevitably functioned differently.

All this is of course airy talk without substance, for it ignores the principal factor—the British Government.

There is another consideration which deserves notice. The Congress, under Mr Gandhi's leadership, has laid great stress on non-violence and the conversion of the adversary rather than his coercion. Quite apart from the metaphysical aspects of this doctrine and its feasibility or otherwise in the final sense, there can be no doubt that this has created a powerful feeling against civil conflict and in favour of attempting to win over the various groups in India. That is a factor of great value to us in preserving the unity of India and in toning down opposition.

People discuss the non-co-operation and civil disobedience movements in terms of constitutional action or otherwise. I have referred to this aspect earlier. May I put to you how they have always impressed themselves on me? Of course these movements exercised tremendous pressure on the British Government and shook the Government machinery. But the real importance, to my

mind, lay in the effect they had on our own people, and especially the village masses. Poverty and a long period of autocratic rule, with its inevitable atmosphere of coercion and fear, had thoroughly demoralized and degraded them. They had hardly any of the virtues that are necessary for citizenship; they were cuffed and bullied by every petty official, tax collector, policeman, landlord's agent; they were utterly lacking in courage or the capacity for united action or resistance to oppression; they sneaked and told tales against each other; and when life became too hard they sought an escape from it in death. It was all very depressing and deplorable, and yet one could hardly blame them for it; they were the victims of all-powerful circumstances. Non-co-operation dragged them out of this mire and gave them self-respect and self-reliance. They developed the habit of co-operative action; they acted courageously, and did not submit so easily to unjust oppression; their outlook widened, and they began to think a little in terms of India as a whole; they discussed political and economic questions (crudely, no doubt) in their bazaars and meeting-places. The lower middle class was affected in the same way, but the change in the masses was the most significant. It was a remarkable transformation, and the Congress under Gandhi's leadership must have the credit for it. It was something far more important than constitutions and the structure of governments. It was the foundation on which alone a stable structure or constitution could be built up.

All this of course involved a cataclysmic upheaval of Indian life. Usually in other countries this has involved a vast amount of violence and hatred. And yet in India, thanks to Mahatma Gandhi, there was, relatively speaking, exceedingly little of this. We developed many of the virtues of war without its terrible evils, and the real organic unity of India was brought far nearer than it had ever been. Even the religious and communal differences toned down. You know that the most vital question that affects rural India—which means 85 per cent of India—is the land question. Any such upheaval in another country, together with the terrible economic depression, would have resulted there in *jacqueries*. It is extraordinary that India escaped them. That was not because of Government repression, but because of Gandhi's teaching and the message of the Congress.

Congress thus released all the live forces in the country and suppressed the evil and disruptive tendencies. It did so in a peaceful, disciplined, and as civilized way as was possible under the circumstances, though inevitably there were risks in such a mass release. How did the Government react? You know that well enough. By trying to crush those live and virile forces and encouraging all the

evil and disruptive tendencies, and doing so in the most uncivilized way. The British Government has functioned in a purely Fascist way during the past six years, and the only difference has been that it did not take open pride in this fact as the Fascist countries do.

This letter has become terribly long, and I do not want now to consider the new Constitution Act in detail. That is hardly necessary, for the Act has been analysed and criticized by a host of persons in India holding all sorts of opinions, but agreeing in one thing—their utter disapproval of the Act. Very recently one of the most eminent leaders of the Indian Liberals described the new Constitution privately as 'The quintessence of the most venomous opposition to all our national aspirations'. Is it not remarkable that even our moderate politicians should think so, and yet you, with all your broad sympathy for Indian aspirations, should approve of it and say that it 'involves the transfer of the citadel of power in India to Indian hands?' Is the gulf between our ways of thinking so vast? Why is it so? It almost becomes more of a problem in psychology than in politics or economics.

The psychological aspect is after all very important. Is it realized in England what the past few years have meant to India? How the attempt to crush human dignity and decency, the injuries to the soul more even than to the body, have left a lasting impress on the Indian people? Never have I realized so well how a tyrannical use of power degrades those who use it as well as those who suffer from it. How can we forget it without forgetting everything that is decent and honourable? How can we forget it when it continues from day to day? Is this the prelude to freedom and the transfer of the citadel of power?

People react in different ways to oppression. Some are broken, others harden. We have both kinds in India as elsewhere. Many of us cannot desert our colleagues, who suffer in prison or otherwise, whatever the consequences might be to our individual selves. Many of us cannot tolerate an insult to Gandhi, whether we differ from him or not, for Gandhi represents to us the honour of India. No one in his senses likes conflict and suffering and the way of catastrophe. The Indian national movement has done all in its power to avoid this way, without at the same time giving up the very basis of its existence. But it is the British Government that has proceeded along that path and made a peaceful solution more and more difficult. If it imagines that by merely persisting in this direction it will succeed, it seems to have strangely misread both the lesson of history and the present temper of the Indian people. If catastrophe is to be avoided, it will have to be for the British Government to retrace its steps.

## CHAPTER XI

*A Tryst with Destiny*<sup>1</sup>

LONG years ago we made a tryst with destiny, and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge, not wholly or in full measure, but very substantially. At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom. A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends, and when the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance. It is fitting that at this solemn moment we take the pledge of dedication to the service of India and her people and to the still larger cause of humanity.

At the dawn of history India started on her unending quest, and trackless centuries are filled with her striving and the grandeur of her success and her failures. Through good and ill fortune alike she has never lost sight of that quest or forgotten the ideals which gave her strength. We end today a period of ill fortune and India discovers herself again. The achievement we celebrate today is but a step, an opening of opportunity, to the greater triumphs and achievements that await us. Are we brave enough and wise enough to grasp this opportunity and accept the challenge of the future?

Freedom and power bring responsibility. That responsibility rests upon this Assembly, a sovereign body representing the sovereign people of India. Before the birth of freedom we have endured all the pains of labour and our hearts are heavy with the memory of this sorrow. Some of those pains continue even now. Nevertheless, the past is over and it is the future that beckons to us now.

That future is not one of ease or resting but of incessant striving so that we may fulfil the pledges we have so often taken and the one we shall take today. The service of India means the service of millions who suffer. It means the ending of poverty and ignorance and disease and inequality of opportunity. The ambition of the greatest man of our generation has been to wipe every tear from

<sup>1</sup> Nehru's speech to the Constituent Assembly<sup>1</sup>, New Delhi, on the eve of Independence, August 14, 1947.

every eye. That may be beyond us, but as long as there are tears and suffering, so long our work will not be over.

And so we have to labour and to work hard, to give reality to our dreams. Those dreams are for India, but they are also for the world, for all the nations and peoples are too closely knit together today for any one of them to imagine that it can live apart. Peace has been said to be indivisible; so is freedom, so is prosperity now, and so also is disaster in this One World that can no longer be split into isolated fragments.

To the people of India, whose representatives we are, we make an appeal to join us with faith and confidence in this great adventure. This is no time for petty and destructive criticism, no time for ill-will or blaming others. We have to build the noble mansion of free India where all her children may dwell.



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